DISCUSSION ON THE WORKING OF THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Now, we will have the discussion on the working of the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology. Shri Nilotpal Basu.

SHRI PRITHVIRAJ CHAVAN (Maharashtra) : Madam, before that, I want to raise one point.

उपसभापति : अभी कोई पाइंट नहीं, डिसकसन शुरू हो गया है।

SHRI PRITHVIRAJ CHAVAN: Madam, we are discussing the working of the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, but the House has not been given the Annual Report of the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology. How can we discuss the subject if we don't have the Annual Report?

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: It is for the Committee to see why they have not submitted the Annual Report. Has the Report not been submitted?

श्रीमती सरला माहेश्वरी (पश्चिमी बंगाल) : एन्युअल रिपोर्ट तो मिनिस्ट्री देती है।

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Do you mean the Annual Report or the Committee Report?

SHRI PRITHVIRAJ CHAVAN: Madam, I mean the Annual Report of the Ministry.

उपसभापति : आप यह सवाल मंत्री जी के सामने रखिएगा।

SHRI NILOTPAL BASU(West Bengal): Madam, since the Prime Minister is still present, I would say that this also is a very sad commentary on how the Government looks at Parliament. I think, 20 days back, we had decided in the Business Advisory Committee that this would be one of the issues that will be discussed when we discuss the functioning of various Ministries. Yesterday evening, when I tried to get the Reports, the Annual Report for Department of Posts was not

available; the Annual Report for Department of Information Technology was not available, and, we are expected to speak on the functioning of the Ministry. The Minister of Parliamentary Affairs was present in the Business Advisory Committee. Even after that, if this is the kind of treatment which is meted out to the Parliament, it is a very, very sad commentary on the Government as a whole.

THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND MINISTER OF DISINVESTMENT (SHRI ARUN SHOURIE): Madam, I will check on this. As far as scheduling of the debate is concerned, it was only yesterday evening I was told that this debate is to commence today. That is what you had decided, because in the Business Advisory Committee, it was decided that the Electricity Bill, which was to be taken up, was not to be taken up. Therefore...(*Interruptions*)...

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I will explain it...(*Interruptions*)...

SHRI ARUN SHOURIE: In any case, Madam, it is my duty to find out why the Reports are not there. They will, certainly, be made available...(*Interruptions*)...

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Just one minute. It was decided that working of four Ministries, that is, the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology and the Ministry of Human Resource Development will be discussed here. This decision was taken even before we went for the recess. Before going for recess, it was decided that it would be discussed. Of course, I agree with you that, today, it has been listed because of the withdrawal of the Electricity Bill. Though it was not to be taken up today, it would have been taken up next week, but the Reports which the hon. Members are asking for should have been made available a little earlier....so that they can study and speak on the subject with a lot of more knowledge. चलिए नीलोत्पल जी, आप बिना रिपोर्ट के बोल दीजिए। अखबार में आता है, आपको सब खबर है, आप अनुभवी हैं।

SHRI NILOTPAL BASU : Madam Deputy Chairperson, it is, I think, a very well development that we are discussing the functioning of the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology this time

around because, the importance of communication and information technology at the present point of time, not only in our country but in the globe as a whole, is not disputed. In fact, one of the major developments that has marked the major enhancement, a revolutionary enhancement, in the capability of the human race as a whole, has been due to a large contribution in major scientific and technological breakthroughs in the field of communications and information technology. Madam, a rough estimate tells us that an investment of about a dollar in the sphere of telecommunication produces a value worth of about $ 6. Therefore, it is extremely important that we develop our communications and information technology capabilities. Several major technological breakthroughs have taken place, especially, with the introduction of satellite technology and the introduction of Very Small Aperture Terminals, the introduction of optical fibre, and the tremendous enhancement in the computational power with introduction of super-computers and all that. Now, it is very important that in that context what we do about our own communications and information technology sector. Now, unfortunately, I slightly sympathise with the Ministry and the Minister concerned also that he has been handed over with a lot of baggage of policy making, so far as this field is concerned. If we look at the kind of policy changes that has formed the functioning of this Ministry in the last 10-12 years, one finds a lot of confusion, and, not only confusion, but there are certain outright irrationalities. Now, if we look at the salient features of the First National Telecom Policy of 1994, we find that the policy started on the premise of not meeting certain objectives in terms of transforming the Indian society with a kind of technological changes integrating them, but basically as a question of resource problem. I remember, we had debated those issues in this august House. The point is that we fixed certain targets in terms of increasing our tele-density, that is, the number of telephones per 100 population, and in order to do that the resources available with the agency concerned -- Department of Telecommunication -- were inadequate. Therefore, this policy was formulated that we would ensure private investment to the tune of bridging that resource gap. Now, Madam, the development of telecom sector all over the world is based on certain basic principles that in order to develop the telecom sector, it will operate within the concept of cross-subsidy. Now this is not specific to certain political and ideological framework. It has been the feature the world over that long distance calls will subsidise local calls and the commercial telephones will subsidise the household telephones,

which are meant for public utility. Now, this is not just an ideological angle that informs this kind of an approach. The investments that are required to reach out telecommunication and telephony to people and the magnitude of the investment depended was in proportion to the usage. Now, the big users need certain features in the technology, in the system, which require huge investment. The recovery also was to take place in proportion to the actual usage. Though it may appear that there was an element of cross-subsidy operating, but, in fact, it was based on a principle of natural justice. This was also economically very sound because, as I maintained in the very beginning itself, investment in this field enhances the productive potential. So, unless we access telephony to a whole lot of people who are economically productive but are on the lower side of the income earning scale, the kind of wealth that they are going to produce is going to languish. Therefore, it is all the more necessary that we reach out to all sections, particularly the vulnerable sections of the society to overhaul productive capacity of the overall society and the economy. Now, unfortunately, while doing this, and while the developed countries having traversed this path, we started in a big way to grow in the telecom sector at a point of time when the Cold War had ended and when a paradigm shift had taken place. Therefore, the whole principle of cross-subsidy was given a go-by. As a result of this, we opened our telecom sector to multi-poly at a point in time when our tele-density was minuscule. So, what has happened? Is this due to the fact that we saw investments in competing networks? Now, the point is, can India as a country, with the kind of wealth that we have, with the kind of per capita GDP that we have, afford to say that investments in the telecom sector are in competing networks, and that will augment our growth potential in this field? Now, if we look at the Annual Report itself, we will find that there is a skewed development. First of all, I think that for the last couple of years, we are including the mobile cellular service connections also as part of our overall growth. But, Madam, you will recognise that even now, the cellular mobile service, notwithstanding the kind of price fall that we have seen over the last few years, is still accessible only to a small section of the society. All sections of the society cannot access it because of the financial handicap that they have, and this is recognised by the International Telecom Unions that tele density is a function of the minimum access fee, as compared to the per capita GDP ratio, and still, in our case, this is one of the highest. Therefore, the minimum access fee in the fixed phone sector in our

country is still increasing. We had a debate here in this House in a different context about the imbalances in the tariff order given by the TRAI that there is increase in the rentals, there is increase for those subscribers who are making a number of cellular calls, and the concession is for those sections of the revenue producers who are making a larger number of calls, who are calling long distance. And if you see the actual graphics in the beginning of the Annual Report, you will notice that there has been a fall in the total number of calls, but the total metered units have gone up. That means, fewer people are making calls, but the total amount is more. That is because of the fact that we are having a more skewed programme. In 1994, when this policy was introduced, 5.5 per cent of the subscribers were producing 64 per cent of the revenue, whereas now, I think, a smaller section of the subscribers will be producing bigger amount of revenue. Why do I tell this? If you see the percentage of the private sector contribution to the overall network, it has gone up. It is almost 20 per cent. But their contribution to the village public telephones is just one per cent. So, the investment that is taking place, is actually further marginalising the disadvantaged section from access to telephone and communication network. This is a major problem, because, if you see, you will find that there is a positive growth of almost 19 per cent in the case of cellular phones, and there is a negative growth for the fixed line services. Now, the cellular phone subscribers are still largely confined to major metropolitan cities and big cities. Therefore, it is amply clear that elsewhere it is not growing in the manner that we wanted it to grow, in terms of both our 1994 and 1999 policies. And this is giving rise to a lot of problems of equity, in terms of access to modern telecom facilities. This is something, which we cannot ignore. On the one hand, there is such a huge growth. Our national tele-density is claimed to be around 4.9. But our rural tele-density languishes at 1.3. And this is not just small. It even compares very, very negatively *vis-a-vis* even some of our poor neighbours; Bangladesh and Sri Lanka have a bigger, larger tele-density in terms of their rural areas. Therefore, how to go about it? Now, over the 1994 policy -- I am not going into the figures because of constraints of time -- what was the expectation? It was that the private sector, when it invests, would share the responsibility. But the fact of the matter is that today, virtually they do not exist. And then, after the 1999 policy, for separation of functions, we said that Government would not take part directly in providing services. Therefore, corporatization of the Department of Telecommunications took place. Now, what happened with the

corporatization of BSNL? Large amounts of money, which were earlier directly available to the telecom sector, now, in the form of excise duty, in the form of sales tax, in the form of corporation tax, in the form of dividends, are getting accumulated in the Consolidated Fund of India. I was going through the report of the Standing Committee. It has made a scathing criticism that hundreds of crores of rupees, which were earlier directly available to the Department of Telecommunications, for fulfilling this major objective, that is, widening the network, deepening the network, enhancing the productive potential of our people, are not made available to them now. 65 per cent of our people still live in the villages. How to use this modern technology in order to overcome these basic infirmities that they are traditionally handicapped with? Unless we can make the benefits of these technologies and developments reach those sections of people, it will hamper our progress. But the fact of the matter is that hundreds of crores of rupees, which were available to us, in terms of our taxes and all that, when it was a full-fledged Government department, are now going to the Consolidated Fund of India. Unlike other Government departments, Department of Telecommunications was a department, which had developed its network, till then, on the strength of its own internal generations. It did not take any budgetary support from the Government. But today, on the one hand, there is no budgetary support, no commensurate increment in the budgetary support to the new *avatar* of the Department of Telecommunications; and, on the other, the money, which was directly available to the telecom sector, is going to the Consolidated Fund of India; it is not coming back. Therefore, they are straddled with all the uneconomic relativities in part of the operations of the telecom sector, and the private sector is not investing in these areas, as I have already shown with the VPT figures. On the other hand, they are not getting the commensurate budgetary support from the Government of India. Now, this will further accentuate the problem. The viability of BSNL will become a problem at a certain point of time.

Once we introduce competition, the capability of the players to cross-subsidise the uneconomic part of its operation also diminishes. And what is happening? See the way we have sequenced our opening up and the number of players we are allowing. Private investment does not mean that a private promoter pays from his or her own pocket. The difficulty is that only a very small portion of the actual investment is coming from the private promoter as equity, and a large portion of the

resources that they raise is actually coming from the public sector financial institutions. We discussed, Madam, - and I am sure the hon. Minister will agree with me - about the NPAs of financial institutions, of banks. Many of these entities which have started operations in this field, which take money from the public sector financial institutions are not in a position to repay it. On the other hand, in order to survive in the competition - and I accept the fact that globally there is also some drop in the prices - they are indulging in predatory prices. As a result, they are, sometimes, even offering prices at a level which is not sustainable. That is the proliferation of the operators. Because there is so much of asymmetry, to the extent to which the revenues are coming from a small section of the big revenue paying subscribers, that they try to cut out the number of the real beneficiaries. We know only that section of the clientele. And, therefore, what happens with the rest? Nobody is looking after them. Only to the small sections, all the benefits of competition are going, at the cost of the overall economy, at the cost of the requirement of the overall network. At the same time, they themselves are becoming unviable. At that point of time, the other problem that happened - and of which, at least, we are very critical - was the manner in which the migration took place of the private operators from the fixed license regime to the revenue share model. In fact, some time back, here, my colleagues were fighting out the issue of contract labour and all that. Everyday, day-in-and-day-out, Members from different States raise the question of sick industries, and all that. The Minister concerned, in his other *avtar* of Disinvestment Minister, argues that they have no money, the Government has no money to run the public sector units. But what happened in the case of migration package from the fixed license regime to the revenue sharing model? Actually, the money was spent from the Government kitty, from the Public Exchequer, and we exposed that. We had made public the internal Cabinet documents, that despite the opposition from the Finance Ministry, it happened. Our predicament is that we see sick industries. But I have never seen a sick promoter. Promoters never go sick. It is the industry which gets sick. Workers come in the industry, but they do not get the Government support. But here was a case where the Metro Cellular Operators were making a killing. They had sold out their licences twice or thrice, but they were still claiming that they were making a loss; therefore, the Government should bail them out. And the Government obliged them! Now, we are seeing a reverse process. Now, the cellular operators who manipulated, who

lobbied with the Government to make some totally irrational gains at that point of time, they are now annoyed that some private operators in the basic service sector are manipulating the conditions of their licence to provide mobile services in the garb of basic services in the WLL sector. We will have a kind of first class soup situation. Now, my point is whether this Ministry can function independently or not. That is a big question. The role of the Ministry is very important and, Madam, I know the Minister's view on this whole question of ownership. But having seen the actual experience of functioning of some of these private sector companies in most of the telecom sector, I would strongly recommend that for market intervention, for a balanced development of the telecom sector, if anybody is harbouring any idea about privatising BSNL or some such entities, that must be given a go by, because we will land ourselves in a first class soup. When this criticism was there that, on the one hand, the private sector was not taking up the responsibility of the development of the telecom sector overall, they were not going to villages, they were not establishing VPTs; and improvement was there in 1999 Policy, there we find the introduction of a Universal Service Obligation Levy Fund. Sir, what is the condition? We find that except about Rs. 1,700 crores, all other aspects of the Telecom Policy, 1999, which are favourable to the private sector are implemented in toto. But still, in this year's Budget, the Government of India has not been able to transfer this Rs. 1,700 crores to the USOL Fund. Why? Why is the enactment not there on all the other issues, where concessions are there for the private sector. I am not really convinced, not because of my ideological conviction. You see, the tele-density. Now, we have to actually look at tele-density in a de-segregated manner. Poor sections of the people whom we were not able to reach, as a result of private investment, are we in a better position to reach them? The nature of growth of these two sectors, cellular and other basic services sector, I am convinced that it is not happening in the manner it should. Therefore, we do not need just investment; we need investment in a manner that is consistent, or, commensurate with our overall objective of transforming the Indian society and the Indian economy and overall growth of our potential. Unfortunately, that is not happening and this USO Levy Fund is also a very sad commentary on the political will of the Government in actually reaching the objectives of universality. That should be an overriding factor in the development of the telecom sector.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Mr. Basu, how much more time will you take now?

SHRI NILOTPAL BASU: I will take about 5-6 minutes, Madam.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Okay, thank you.

SHRI NILOTPAL BASU: The other thing I would like to mention is that there is an impression in this country that particularly this Ministry is being influenced by lobbies. There is no point in beating about the bush; I will be very candid about it. I think, the Minister concerned is also aware of it. You cannot just do this. Sometime, some cellular industry people become influential, they influence the Policy. Sometimes, a particular basic service provider becomes very influential and he influences. The rule of law, the independence, is not there. Apart from autonomy, there is another major problem. Our policy was never technology neutral. Today, the situation is that, and everybody will agree, there are many technology options available in the world. When we formulate the tender conditions and all that, we specify the technology also. Now, when newer technologies are available, the right way of going about it is to actually auction the spectrum and allow the freedom of technology to the players. We did not do that. We are in a very bad logjam. If we want to overcome this, it should not be by refusing to open the files to the public, but by becoming more transparent. Then only we can address the situation. It is very important to restore the credibility of the Government. Ultimately, that is the yardstick and, I reiterate, in a country like India, that is the way in which the telecom should go about.

Madam, I am personally involved in a project in West Bengal. Our experience is that there is a tremendous upsurge in the requirement of telephones by the people. They want to use the technology. I, sometimes, feel that this whole idea of rural telephony is not really an economic proposition. This also needs some kind of a review. You see the kind of revenue that is being generated by village public telephones. This you have indicated in your Annual Report of the Dak Sanchar Sevak. As part of an NGO, we are operating in association with the BSNL. Our experience is that the people want it and it can become viable. Therefore, some refashioning of our priority has to be done. We can feel satisfied that our tele-density has gone up to 4.9 and we can point out

19 per cent growth in cellular service. But it is not the case because in many parts of India, where access is not available, major changes are not taking place. Still the development is concentrated in and around big cities.

Here comes the question of synergy with the Postal Services. Madam, I submit that in the case of Postal Services also, there is the bugbear of privatisation. If privatisation can actually solve our problems, there will be no problem now. But it is not so. What is happening is this. This courier service and all that cannot really cater to the communication needs of a large section of our people, millions of our people. So, we have to desegregate the different activities of the Postal Department and see where the functions can be done on a purely commercial basis and how we can improve our profit. It should be ploughed back to those areas where, in order to ensure equity in terms of communication facilities, postal communication facilities need to be provided and sustained. This is not possible in a purely private environment. This is also linked to the issue of our activities in the IT sector. Sometimes, we tend to discuss our achievements in the IT sector only in the context of how much exports that we are making in software.

Without de-segregating, which is the area? Is it the high-value end of the sector where we are increasing our activities? Things are very, very fluid. Today, we are producing software at a competitive price. Tomorrow, China can come up, some other country can come up because basically these are areas where it is a question of the big players, the global players, trying to maximise their own profits. So, for the jobs that they are getting done in India at a comparatively cheaper price, if they see that there is some other player which will do it even more cheaper, our markets will fall. If we concentrate in areas where we are doing work in the high value sector, which is very crucial, which cannot be replaced, our strength will be enhanced there. Therefore, it is a little alarming that in spite of such an important development in terms of overall value of our I.T. sector, our hardware is not progressing in the manner that we should like. At the same time, you see, apart from the commercial sector, how we can use the information technology as a tool for enhancement of the other goods and services that we are producing.

1.00 P.M.

Information technology, as distinct from other areas, is not an autonomous technology. It adds value to your existing portfolio of goods and services. Therefore, this whole concept of I.T. development in the Indian context has to have an emphasis, an underlined emphasis on e-governance, e-development, on how we can integrate the sections of the people, which are not a part of our development mainstream, with our development mainstream. (*Time-Bell*). Madam, I will take two minutes more just to wind up.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Okay. Then we will adjourn for lunch.

SHRI NILOTPAL BASU: Madam, I think the emphasis also, therefore, should not be only on I.T. literacy - I.T. literacy is important - but on how even with the I.T. illiterates, the development of information technology can be reached; what will be the organisational structure; how can we take it to the panchayat level, at the grassroot level. That is very important. How that value addition can take place in our planning process, is also very important. But, unfortunately, that emphasis, I think, is slightly missing. As a new sector, we understand it. But now, it is a very, very competitive atmosphere and environment that we are functioning in.

As a country, given the kind of ethos, the kind of milieu that we have, we have to actually design our priorities on the basis of our requirements and, I think, it will be foolhardy on our part to ape certain trajectories of development elsewhere in the world.

I am sure, if this discussion today can usher in a little bit of change in the direction of thinking, the policy making, the functioning of the department and the related agencies in the country, it will be the Parliament's big contribution to the overall well being of our people. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: There was a demand for the Annual Reports and the hon. Minister has been able to send me a note that they were planning to distribute these copies on 27th because we were going to debate on this on 30th. Yet, he got 70 copies of the Annual Report

available now. So, those who want to have it, they can have it. The House is adjourned for lunch for one hour.

The House then adjourned for lunch at one of the clock.

The House re-assembled after lunch at six minutes past two of the clock,

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN in the Chair.

उपसभापति : श्री पृथ्वीराज चौहान। आपकी पार्टी के तीन नाम हैं, उस हिसाब से टाइम डिवाइड कर दीजिए।

श्री पृथ्वीराज चौहान : समय कितना है?

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: You have 54 minutes in total, and three speakers. So, you can divide it accordingly.

SHRI PRITHVIRAJ CHAVAN (Maharashtra): Thank you, Madam, for giving me an opportunity to participate in the debate on the working in the Ministry of Communications. If I am not wrong, I think, this is the first time that we are discussing Information Technology and, I think, it is also the first time after the integrated structure of the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology is together into one Ministry. Madam, when we look at the field of telecommunications and even, to some extent, IT, because they are very closely connected, over the past five years, the picture that comes to mind, is one of series of major scandals. Right from the beginning, when the cellular licence fee, in which bidders had bid something like Rs. 1,53,000 crores licence fee, in a midnight coup, the then Communication Minister was removed; the Prime Minister took charge of the Department himself and struck a deal with these companies and there was huge potential loss to the exchequer. The Public Accounts Committee has commented on all these things. There has been a serious problem about disinvestment of the VSNL. This House has debated that. There is also a problem of backdoor entry to the cellular field *via* the WLL route to some favoured corporates, the matter which is under litigation now. And, also, in the field of information technology, the famous, or infamous, collaboration with the American University, Carnegie Mellon University, that a huge Rs. 5,000 crore worth project was being considered. There is a whole series of scandals, and

there was a tacit admission of something grievously wrong with communications, by the Government, by the Prime Minister, that he handed over the charge of this Department to a person like Mr. Arun Shourie. But, Madam, this Government is facing so many scandals in so many Departments that Prime Minister will need 50 more Arun Shouries to boost up its credibility. But, it goes to the credit of current Communications Minister that he has been specifically brought in to give the face-lift to the Department which is facing so much litigation and to restore the credibility of the Government of India, and I wish him luck in this endeavour. Madam, we are discussing actually three different Departments, which were earlier full Ministries. And, since I have limited time, I will just touch very few points regarding the Ministry of Communication and devote rest of my time to the information technology, which is generally not discussed in the House. The Minister has a major task in setting the Regulator's Office in order. We have experimented with TRAI, with TDSAT, amended the law few times, but still, series of litigations are there. Madam, when we deregulate such sectors which touch the lives of the common people and where technology is advancing at such a rapid rate, as has not been seen in human history, the role of a regulator is very, very crucial. Regulator has to be statutory; yes, it is. It has to be independent. I do not know whether it is really fully independent or not. And, the regulatory has to be transparent. Only then can we really have a level playing field, and only then can we attract huge Foreign Direct Investment. There is a huge scope for getting FDI. We have got maximum FDI in these fields. But then, the FDI has dried up because of litigations, because the Government kept on changing, moving the goal posts, and investors were not sure about the regulatory regime. I hope the one major contribution that Mr. Shourie can make to the telecom sector, to the entire economy of the country, is to set the regulator's house in order. Whatever legislation is required, whatever statutory change is required, the House would support it. But we need to have an agency which will be looked at by the players as being very fair, as a neutral umpire, who will not lean in favour of one or the other at the request of political bosses. The WLL litigation is going on. The Minister has taken an initiative to sort it out. And, I wish him success. He should sort it out. Unless those matters are amicably settled, we will have a problem.

The problem of low tele-density was referred to by my colleague who spoke earlier, who initiated the debate. I think, we are now going towards the area of wireless. I think, the era of fixed line telephones with cables and all those things has come to an end. If we look at the ratio of the mobile wireless systems, either through the GSM route or through the CDMA route, the ratio of fixed to mobile is changing. There are many countries where there are more mobile users than landline users. And, I think, that is the only way to really increase the tele-density in rural areas. you have to have innovative tariff strategies, to make the companies go and offer these services in rural areas. The promise of rural roll-out has not been fulfilled by the people who took basic licences. There have been no punishments. The record has been poor. I think we have to build in an element of cross- subsidy in the tariff structure, and that is another challenge which the telecom sector faces. There is also a problem of the Multiple Access Rural Radio Systems (MARRS), which were set up earlier for providing access in rural areas. The complete investment has gone dead. We need either to replace them with something or improve them. I do not know what the Government is doing. I think, the Minister will tell us what he plans to do about it.

Madam, I will make some suggestions about the communications sector later on. But, I think, with the limited time that I have, I would like to now move on to Information Technology, as I want to devote more of my time to talk about that Department. It is being discussed after a long time. First of all, I would like to question the basic myth that India is an I.T. super power. Yes; we have substantial software exports. A lot of our people are going to America and making it good. The photographs are appearing in international papers and magazines. And, there are many success stories. But Information Technology is just not software alone; it is also hardware. And, hardware is a strategically very important area. And, I think, I will not be very wrong if I say that India does not figure on the hardware map of the world at all. We had some hardware sector. But with the lowering of the tariff rates and all that now, most of the computers that you see coming into India are all assembled or most of them are fabricated outside, or, at least, the basic components, the integrated circuits, are all imported because we have no semi-conductor industry today. The only company which we had, namely, the Semi-Conductor Complex Limited had a very dubious distinction of having burnt down once, and we do not know about the fire that took place, whether

it was a sabotage or it was an accident or whether somebody really tried to stop India's strategic advantage by destroying that unit in a very mysterious fire that took place some time back. We want this country to have an independent semiconductor sector, independent electronic component sector. It is very expensive and many advise and many say that it is no longer necessary, no longer needed because we are living in a globalised world, but semiconductor hardware, semiconductor components are strategically so important. You take any defence equipment; you take missiles; you take modern warfare, you take computer boxes working in offices that we see, all their brains; all their micro-processors; all their semiconductors, are all imported. If America was to switch off the tap, so to say, because some strategic difficulties we might have, I wish that do not happen, but if that happens, if there are technology sanctions, then, Madam, I do not think we can even operate the voice system in our Parliament or even ordinary telephones that we use, the exchanges that we have got, all of them work with the imported semiconductors, which we do not make today. I think this country needs to make an investment in strategic electronic area, the area of semiconductor electronics, without that we will not be self-sufficient. It will take time. It will take a lot of money. Semiconductor Complex Ltd. had requested for Rs. 274 crores. But what has been given? Rs. 5 crores ! Paltry Rs. 5 crores! I think, we have already given up. We feel that we cannot do anything in hardware. It is only Taiwan or China, which can do something. South Korea can do it. Japan is already doing it. But India is nowhere in the picture. And it is a very dangerous situation. So, when we call ourselves the IT super power, I would like to warn you that we are only a software super-power. 'Super-power', yes, we have an advantage of English language, but that will not be with us for a very long time. Every other country, China, even smaller countries like Cyprus, Ireland, Philippines, you name the country, they are all investing in English language education. And when they catch up with us in English language, I think the natural advantage that we have in the IT-enabled services, Back Office Processing, will disappear. We also pride ourselves in saying that we have got a huge software manpower. Is it really true? What is the quality of your top level engineering manpower in the field of IT? There are about 10 or 12 IIT level institutions. Seven or eight IITs and about four or five Indian Institutes of Information Technology. These are producing something like, even if you take about 100 graduates a year, we are talking about maximum of 1000 to 1200 top

level software engineers or IT engineers. To that if you add another 20 or 30 Regional Engineering Colleges which are at a fairly good level, take another three or four thousand. We are really producing world class, top class IT engineers, but not more than three to four thousand in a year. Is that enough? Yes, there are many students going to street shops, in every street corner you have got an institute teaching computers. Yes, they are doing. But what are they doing? Yes, they are contributing to the economy of this country. It may be that they are also contributing to the exports. But if you really want to call yourself IT super - power, then we need to increase this high quality engineering output manifold. We need more institutions. Maybe, you can have private universities. Maybe, the Government needs to have innovative public-private partnership in this area so that we can have 40 or 50 IIT level institutes.

Madam, I have a suggestion about semiconductors. This country missed the boat, whoever was in power that time is not material. But this country missed the boat when major semiconductor companies in the world - top four or five - wanted to come to India. But, unfortunately, we said, 'No'. We will not allow you unless you have majority equity participation of Indian partners. They did not want to do that. We missed that boat. Now, nobody will come. I want the Minister to consider inviting major semiconductor giants to come to India, offer them 25 per cent equity, for a world class semiconductor fabrication facility, a world class wafer fab will cost around 1.5 billion dollars, about Rs. 7000 to 8000 crores. Maybe it will require an equity of about Rs. 2000 to Rs. 2500 crores. You offer them on a platter 25 per cent equity, something like Rs.500 crores without even having any voting rights or any rights in the company formation just as the venture capital fund. But please invite international companies to set up a world class wafer fab in India. It is strategically a very crucial area. You saw what happened in the Iraq war. It is information war now. These are microprocessors and computers, which are running the Cruise Missiles and Smart Bombs. If you want to become an economic and military super-power, we cannot ignore this sector.

Madam, I will just touch upon the factor of allocations to the information technology sector. The Government has given Rs. 470 crores. What was asked for was Rs.1147 crores. The allocation is the same as it was in the last year. A decision was taken two or three years back that

every Ministry and Department of the Government of India would contribute 3 per cent of its budget to IT solutions and the IT area. Now, that was a very good and a very nice thing to say, and people thought that a lot of money would come. But it was only a euphemistic way of saying, "You don't need money". What happened? Since it was not compulsory, since no separate Budget Head was created and since there was no monitoring, we didn't know what happened. Any expenditure incurred by any Ministry for buying computers was not really the development of IT. Maybe, they created a market; but you buy anyway. What we need today is to increase the allocation for this strategically important area. It is not what it contributes to GDP. Whether it contributes 2.5 per cent or whether it will contribute 7 per cent is not important. It is a metaresource. IT will enable every single field, whether it is agriculture, water resources, water management or whatever. Everything will be enabled by this I.T., and this needs to be enhanced. Tokenism will not do. I think, we need to really discuss in this House what we want the Department of Information Technology to be? The Department in its Annual Report - which we got just an hour ago, - it is a very well-produced report; I wish we had got it a little earlier - talks about a whole series of R&D projects which are run by the Department of Electronics. There are multiple agencies - C-DAC, SAMEER, C-MET, NCST and so on. I don't know how many of them are there. And there is a whole list of projects being developed - this project was started, and completed; this project was started, and was going on; this project was started, and completed. What is the exact definition of a project being completed? There is this 'Intiative in Indian Language Computing'. Then, you have the 'Initiative in Super Computing'. So many initiatives are there. Mr. Minister, I would like to request you one thing. Please, do not be taken in by the scientists who give you a demo in their labs and say that this is working, this is there and so on. A very slic demo would be given. Ask them a question - something like what Gandhiji used to ask as to where you should put your money - "Is this product that you have developed available in Connaught Place? Is it available in South Extension? Is it available in M.G. Road, Bangalore?" The answer will be, "No. We have given this technology to somebody, but they have not yet commercialised it. Therefore, it is not available". If it is not available to the common man, it is useless to the society. All the money that you have spent on R&D is totally dead and zero. This goes not only for your Department but, I think, it goes for all the R&D being done by this

country, including the Defence R&D. We need to learn to find out whether the fruits of the development done by IITs and by various institutions under your control are really available to the common man in the market for a price so that one can walk into a shop and be able to buy it. It is not happening. I will give you some examples. Take the Indian Language Technology. Report says that we have got Optical Character Recognition (OCR). If it is there, Madam - you are a very advanced computer-user yourself - do you have the Hindi OCR with you? But they say that it has already been developed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I have the LIPI programme.

SHRI PRITHVIRAJ CHAVAN: Yes, but that is a writing programme. But why not this text-reading programme? Who else will do it? Do you want Microsoft to do it? Then, you have the 'Speech-to-Text', the voice-recognition system. These areas will enable the common man to use IT. Please focus your IT effort into areas which can be used by the common man. There can be many examples. I do not have enough time. But there are lots of announcements. Take TERAFLOP computer, a very good-sounding name. How many have been sold abroad? People tell you that this is the best in the world, and this is the cheapest in the world; in the market it is available for 'X' rupees; it is available at one-tenth of the cost here. It is all nonsense. If it was available at one-tenth of the cost here, the whole world would have beaten the path to your door. It is not happening. The scientific research that this Department is doing, and most of the scientific departments are doing, need a market-focus. Please, decide the projects if they are really relevant to the country. Of course, if there are the strategic aspects to it, the defence aspect to it, those will have to be done, irrespective of the market value. But the other projects which are being done, must have the market orientation. They have to be useful to the society. Please do not wait for the products to be available from the West.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We call that 'Research Bench to Bazaar'

SHRI PRITHVIRAJ CHAVAN: That is a very good slogan, Madam, 'Bench to Bazaar'. 'Lab to field', as you say.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I used it many years ago in my book.

SHRI PRITHVIRAJ CHAVAN: I think, it is a very good suggestion. Madam, may I suggest this? You have under you, a Committee of this House which looks at computerisation in the Parliament and giving computers to the Members. Whatever software product that the Department of Information Technology is saying that it has developed, please ask them to give you a copy, to all of us a copy, and let us see using it in the labs here, in the offices that we have upstairs whether they really work or not, whether they are really available in the market or not.

SHRI ARUN SHOURIE: That is a very good suggestion. We will do it at once.

SHRI PRITHVIRAJ CHAVAN: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I will be very happy because the Members really now use the computers.

SHRI ARUN SHOURIE: We will make sure.

SHRI PRITHVIRAJ CHAVAN: The point that I want to make, Mr. Minister is that you have to develop a new strategy in all these areas. There are certain things which will really make a qualitative difference to life in India. Don't spread your resources thin. They are very, very thin, I admit. You don't do everything just because it is glamorous because some research lab Director says, 'I want to do it because the Americans are doing it'. Please don't spread your resources too thin.

One very important point I would like to make is about the dominance of an American company in the software world, the Microsoft and the operating system software that they sell. The Microsoft is one company which touches all our lives every day, every hour. It is a great success story. I salute Mr. Bill Gates who has developed it into a great industry. But, there is a point. There are alternatives available, particularly open source software, Linux software which is 1/10th the cost or may be 1/20th the cost. It is being used throughout the world in ever increasing numbers. Why is the Government of India in buying computer hardware insisting on using a proprietary operating system and a proprietary

software made by one American company in its tenders? The job can be done equally well by a non-proprietary, open source software, Linux type of software. I think the Government of India, and you Mr. Minister, personally should look at this aspect. It is really a very grave aspect. It virtually amounts to the clash of civilisations and I think it is not really surprising that the Governments of China, France and Germany very important countries and if you look at the Iraq conflict today, these are the countries which have sponsored open source software. I think you need to join these third world countries, including Brazil which are sponsoring the open source software which is 1/10th the cost of the proprietary American software. I think, let the user have his choice. If they really need a particular proprietary system, yes; let them have it. But, please don't write in the tenders - if you are doing in many cases, please don't do that - that the user must provide only US proprietary software. There are some projects done by NCST.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I don't want to interfere, but the question is, whether it is compatible to each other because we deal with the world. If the whole world is using Windows whether the Linux system will be communicating with Windows software. Like we have the other system, the Microsoft and the other one is there which is not compatible.

SHRI PRITHVIRAJ CHAVAN: Madam, I would request the Minister to install some Linux based software systems in your office and in our offices here and whatever work has been done by his research lab, NCST and others, giving Indian language support on these things, let us see whether they work or not. These systems are working throughout the world. The largest companies like IBM and others are supporting this movement. Madam, that was my limited point. The point is whether the Minister would inform the House sometimes later as which are the countries in the world which are supporting open source movement. My information is, China, France, Germany and other countries which have a particular political point of view are supporting open source against the U.S. proprietary software.

Madam, there are many issues that one would like to touch. On the telecom side, I would like to give you two concrete suggestions. BSNL and MTNL are a public companies. Tomorrow whether it is disinvested or not, we don't know. Maybe, you are also incharge of

disinvesting it, it will be. Please create the presence in the market place because it is going to compete with the private sector operators. Please tell every STD operator to display a brand logo of BSNL, MTNL; design maybe a better logo, the present logo could do with changes. When you go abroad, you see Mercury and Sprint and all this. These STD operators, without any cost to the Department will create the ambience about the brand and that brand equity is important in today's world. Secondly, the STD booths that you have and which are thousands and thousands in number, these people are interested only in long distance calls. They are not interested in local calls. Maybe, you could consider making it compulsory for every STD booth operator to keep a coin box telephone in his booth so that a person can just put a coin and operate without bothering the operator. These are some of the suggestions. Madam, I think, we have been making a point that these Ministries need to be integrated. The two Ministries, particularly, the Information Technology and Communications have been brought together. I think there is also a need to bring the Information and Broadcasting Ministry under the overall ambit of the Information Ministry. Now what needs to be done? You have the TRAI, you have the Telecom Commission as a policy maker and you have corporations. The corporations today some of them are in the public sector and some of them may not be tomorrow. Why do you need a whole bureaucracy? What you need to do is, maybe, frequency-planning cell, Wireless frequency allocation cell is there. All These regulatory functions either can be done by the TRAI, or, by your Telecom Commission. But entire the operating part can be taken away from the Department. So, it becomes a very small Department. Similarly, you have got the Prasar Bharti for Information and Broadcasting. It is a separate entity. You just need a policy level body at the top. You do not need a whole bureaucracy. The IT should really be enabled. Actually the reason why electronic industry grew in India was because the Government did not interfere too much. It grew by itself. The moment you have a big bureaucracy in the Ministry of Information Technology, it gets stifled. I think the Ministry of Information Technology needs to be a facilitator, maybe, think like a venture fund. The speed with which the technology is moving, no Government can really regulate or control. The best of the Governments, most of the advanced Governments cannot regulate or control the speed with which the technology is moving. I think what you need to do is to identify those people in the private sector, who are willing to be partners with you, as you have taken initiative in the case of

the Media Lab, which you are partnering with MIT. I hope something good comes out of it. But what you need to do is, do not invest in research yourself. But enable other people to do it. Maybe, consider yourself as a venture capital fund. Spew many millionaires or successful billionaires like Mr. Narayan Murthy and others. That is what the role of the Ministry of the Information Technology should be. Madam, it is a technical subject. I am sorry for using some technical jargon. I tried to avoid it but. It is a technical subject. It is strategically a very important area for the defence of the country, for the future well being of the country and for a high economic growth of the country. There are huge numbers being predicted by various think-tanks. India can achieve it. But I request the Minister to please focus and concentrate on hardware sector, focus and concentrate on manufacturing, on having an indigenous semiconductor industry, a world class wafer fab so that we are not caught napping. Thank you.

उपसभापति : अब आपने जो सजेशन दिया है I will work on it myself. मंत्री जी तो जब करेंगे, तब करेंगे I will start in my office.

SHRI BALBIR K. PUNJ (Uttar Pradesh): Madam, I thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak on this subject. Madam, in the area of knowledge, the greatest discovery after the invention of the metal-type in the 15th century was the chip. Till 15th century having a book was a privilege because only hand-written books could be circulated. But after the metal-type was discovered in China, it very soon spread to the world over and the books became accessible even for common people at affordable prices. And the result was a knowledge explosion. After a gap of almost 500 years, another discovery that of the chip, the computer has revolutionised the area of knowledge. Now, we have Internet which makes it possible to view the world at the click of a mouse and at a fraction of the cost. I remember, Madam, I started working in a newspaper way back in 1971, and there used to be one dictionary which would be given by the office to the editorial staff and the dictionary would be chained to the desk so that nobody can steal and nobody can remove it. And, at times, we had to take turns, if we wanted to consult a dictionary. Now, each reporter and sub-editor has a personal computer and a dictionary is also there. So, now, he is not depending on the dictionary. It is there just as a symbol. Now, if you want information on any subject, it is just a click away. In fact, ten years ago, if one knew

how to read and write, he was called a literate and the person who could not read or write was called an illiterate. But, now, we are in an era that those of us who do not know how to click a Mouse or those of us who do not know how to operate a mobile phone and those of who cannot access internet, they are all called 'computer illiterate.' And, very soon, the word 'computer' would be dropped and we would be just called as illiterate.

कृषि और ग्रामीण उद्योग मंत्रालय के राज्य मंत्री (श्री संघ प्रिय गौतम) : इनमें से मैं एक भी चीज नहीं जानता ।

SHRI BALBIR K. PUNJ : So, Sir, you know what you would be called.

उपसभापति : आप मेरे कमरे में आ जाइए, मैं आपको सिखा दूंगी ।

SHRI BALBIR K. PUNJ: This clearly shows how important this area has become. Today, somewhere, there is a convergence of knowledge. Madam, entertainment, communications and computers converge somewhere. In the case of communications, we have seen the kind of revolution. A lot has been said how bad things come in. And, somewhere, there was also a suggestion how good things were in the good olden days. And, how liberalisation has brought in corruption, how the rural areas are neglected and how things are not moving the way they ought to be. Public memory is short. But, Madam, it is not all that short. I still remember the days when for one telephone connection people would use any amount of influence. If you wanted to make an STD call, it was really a difficult job. People used to use the influence of a Minister and they even used to bribe to get a telephone connection. I had seen people using Minister's influence to get their telephone shifted. I had seen the people using the influence of a Minister to get their telephone repaired. Madam, Faridabad is very nearby. And, I still remember the days when people, who had business both in Faridabad and Delhi, dial early in the morning to their unit in Faridabad, or, somebody from their unit in Faridabad to their unit in Delhi, and used to talk till such time the connection automatically got disconnected because if you called once and you got a line and after that if you disconnect it, you do not know whether you will get line in the next 12 to 15 hours. So, I remember people making calls in the morning at 6 o' clock or 7 o' clock

and for the whole day that one line and one connection used to remained busy. We have come a long way. In the last five years alone, we have increased the number of telephone connections to 5 crores. Out of these, four crores are landlines and one crore is cellular lines. There is, almost, 250 per cent increase in the last five years. A claim has been made that we are doing very well in the area of IT. But, is not all that solid? Maybe, we are able to do something because we have a good English speaking population. It was also said, maybe, we are doing very well in the area of software exports. But, as far as hardware exports are concerned, we are still a paper tiger and our claims do not match with our performance. Somewhere, the facts reveal something else.

I am just quoting figures, how we have improved at a massive speed in the case of both, hardware and software, in the last five years. In the year 1998-99, our total production in hardware was worth Rs. 25,250 crores, and in software, it was Rs. 15,890 crores. In the year 1999-2000, our production moved up to Rs. 28,100 crores in respect of hardware, and Rs. 24,350 in respect of software. In the year 2000-01, our hardware production moved up to Rs. 30,200 crores, and the software production moved up to Rs. 37,750 crores. In the year 2001-02, our hardware production was worth Rs. 32,750 crores, which is not a small figure; and, the software production was about Rs. 47,000 crores. In the current year, that is, 2002-03, our hardware production is worth Rs. 37,050 crores, and the software production is almost worth Rs. 60,000 crores. And, our overall production is going to touch one lakh crores. For a country, which is known as a Third World Country, which is known for poverty and illiteracy, this is a great achievement. We, as Indians, should feel proud of it. Of course, there is scope for improvement. But, there is a lot for us to feel proud of. And, it is not only the production where we have done extremely well, but despite facing strong competition from developed and developing countries, we have done well in other areas too. If you look at our export performance - I will just quote figures - in 1998-99, our hardware exports were worth Rs. 18,000 crores; and, today, that is, in 2002-03, it is more than Rs. 6,600 crores. It is almost 350 per cent rise in the export of hardware, in the last five years. Similarly, in the software, in 1998-99, our export was worth Rs. 10,940 crores. Next year, that is, in 1999-2000, it moved up to Rs. 17,500 crores. Then, in 2000-01 - again a big jump - it moved up to Rs. 28,350 crores. Then, in 2001-02, it doubled, and it doubled to Rs. 56,500 crores.

This year, that is, in 2002-03, it is worth Rs. 47,500 crores. And, the overall total, if you look at it, is worth Rs. 54,105 crores. If you look at future, they indicate to a time - if we play our cards well, if we invest where we need to invest, if we focus on this area - when we are bound to emerge as global power very soon. At the moment, the IT software and service industry account for about 2.4 per cent of the GDP and 20.4 per cent of our exports. Now, this figure is likely to move up to 7 per cent, that is, seven per cent of India's GDP will be contributed by this industry, and our export will account for up to 35 per cent of this industry, in another four years. In four years, our performance, if it goes like that, is almost going to double. Then, a large number of Indian companies have acquired international quality certification. India's expertise in emerging technologies has actually helped the country to get new customers. The companies in Europe and Japan are increasing their outsourcing to India. Then, the IT-enabled service sector has emerged as a key sector. It is the key driver of growth for the Indian software and services industry. Madam, this segment is also going to have a very high rate of growth in the next few years, and India must claim its share. I am going to quote here from the Report of the NASSCOM Mckinsey, issued in June, 2002. "It has reiterated that despite recent slowdown, the Indian IT services and IT enabled services industry is poised to meet its long-term exports potential of US $ 57-65 billion during 2008, though the service line mix is likely to be different. The IT enabled services sector has witnessed explosive growth during the last two years. As a result, the IT enabled services exports is likely to reach US $ 21-24 billion by 2008. The larger Indian companies are focussing on IT value chain, by offering services, such as system integration, package implementation, IT outsourcing and IT consulting, as well as targeting new verticals, such as utilities, healthcare and retailing, in addition to the traditional financial services, telecom equipment and manufacturing industries." Madam, the number of people who are likely to get jobs is 6.5 lakhs. And, at the moment, 2.5 lakh are working in the IT software and services export industry; nearly 60,000 in IT enabled services, 25,000 in domestic software market, and over 2,60,000 in user organizations. But, having said so, I don't think we can afford to be complacent. Though our achievements are very impressive, and the future also seems to be bright, but when we look, at the world around us, we find that in comparison to other countries, our performance is slow and we need to accelerate it. I will just compare India's performance, *vis-a-vis*, some of the leading countries

and, then, it can be seen how much still remains to be done. Since the hon. Minister is here, I would like to draw his attention to the great distance which India still has to cover. As I said, our tele-density has, virtually, improved to 50 per thousand lines. But in comparison, if you look at Japan, it is 500; in the case of Hong Kong, it is 557; in the case of Singapore, it is 562, for Taiwan, it is 524, for South Korea, it is 432, Malaysia is four times us, that is, 201, even China is over 70, Indonesia is, of course, behind us. The Asian average comes to 253 as against our performance of 50. And the non-Asian average is about 400. Sir, in the area of tele-density alone, where we have improved our performance by two-and-a-half times in the last five years, still, we are miles behind the developed countries, including our neighbour China.

Then, I come to the figures relating to internet hosts per 10,000. Our figure is 0.78 per thousand internet hosts. That is, for internet hosts per 10,000, our figure is 0.78. I would like to compare the figures with other countries. For Japan, it is 133, Hong Kong, 356, Singapore, 259, Taiwan - 142, and Philippines, in a country like Philippines, it is - 3, Thailand 7.25, and China is close to us, it is 0.84. Maybe, the enormous size of the country makes it difficult for us to make internet facility available everywhere, because one of the pre-qualifications for having internet facility is that you should have good power position. But, unfortunately, many parts of our country do not have reliable and quality power. Till we don't have power in remote areas, there is no way the Government and the hon. Minister can make available the Internet connections there. But, at the same time, we have also to understand that till we don't have internet density to the level of the developed countries, there is no way we can compete with them in the near future, and the difference between us and them, which is already very wide, will continue to increase further.

Then, personal computers per thousand in the case of India, the average is 3.78 which is, virutally, half of China. In Philippines, it is 16.28; of course, in Japan, it is 272; in Hong Kong, it is 310; in Singapore, it is 343. If you look at it further, it makes a depressing reading. I have some other figures also, but I don't want to burden the House with the details. The point I want to make is, though we have done very well for our sense, we need to accelerate the pace, we need to augment the

facilities. We cannot divorce the progress in this particular area with what happens in the other areas, particularly, in the area of power.

Madam, our emergence as an IT power has ruffled some feathers. In fact, your strength, in any area, is determined by the strength of your competitors. I am happy and that gives me a sense of satisfaction. Of course, it also should put us on alert, at the same time, that our massive rise in this area, in the last five years, has upset the Americans, upset the Malaysians, Australians and even the people in Great Britain. On April 9, 2003, 270 IT professionals who were all gone on valid visas, with proper papers, work permits to Malaysia, were attacked. And, they were not attacked by hoodlums, but they were attacked by the police of that country. The pretext was to check their papers. They all had valid papers, but the Malaysian police throwing all international norms to the winds, defaced their passports, humiliated them, took them to police station, and in a very cruel manner tried to terrorise them. I am very happy that the Government of India took the entire incident, in right earnest, took up the issue with the Malaysian authorities; some hard measures were also adopted. Arms were twisted and Malaysians came to their senses. But, this incident points to the sort of danger our experts, the people who go as our IT ambassadors the worldover face. And, this is the sort of challenges which lie before us. At the moment, there are about 40,000 Indians in Malaysia, and half of them are believed to be from IT area.

Then, Madam, just two weeks after that, another incident took place. And it was from Netherlands. About 13 IT professionals from IFlex Solutions Private Ltd., an internationally acclaimed company in that area, which makes software in the banking and financial instruments....They were picked up on a very flimsy ground of Visa. Even their top officer who was in Great Britain was picked up at the instance of the Dutch Police, and they were humiliated. Madam, the people who talk in terms of free-trade, the people who talk in terms of breaking of barriers, the people who talk in terms of a global village, when they have to face competition, they come to the lowest level, and this was another example of that.

3.00 P.M.

Then, Madam, we have also seen that one Bill is being moved in New Jersey by a Senator, Shirley Turner. It is called 'S.B. 1349'. The Bill is aimed at stopping the American firms from outsourcing from outside, and it is going to affect India badly. The Bill is still pending, and I am happy that the Government of India has been very prompt. It has taken up suitable action. It has started lobbying. I believe, the NASSCOM has been given the job to create a suitable lobby within the American power structure. But, this is not the only State. There are States like Maryland, Connecticut, Washington; and, there is an apprehension that also in States like California, Missouri and Wisconsin, efforts are being made to stop outsourcing from countries like India so that the jobs do not go outside. So, we will have to be careful, we will have to be on our guard. I will suggest to the Minister that we should have a permanent cell within the Government, within the Ministry which keeps an eye on such developments, on such global trends, because as we progress, these things and these incidents are going to multiply, and they can obviously pose a threat to our industry.

Then, in Great Britain also, again a great votary of free trade, the Communication Workers Union (CWU) have protested against the decision of the British Telecom (BT) opening two call centres in India and which is eventually going to employ 2200 people. So, wheresoever we are going to be active, wheresoever our professionals are going to outdo their rivals, both in terms of pricing and quality, we are going to face fair and unfair competition. I am sure, our professionals can take on these people till the rules of the game are clear, till the competition is fair. But if the competition turns ugly, if the Police is used, to demoralise our people, if the pretext of visa is used to humiliate them, then the State has a role and the Government of India should be there on their side.

Madam, after having said all this, I will also draw the attention of the Minister to the important fact, which has been done earlier also, that now that the cross-subsidy is over, i.e., the MTNL, the BSNL, are making money from long-distance calls and subsidising its operations in rural areas and the private sector has come in a big way, we have to focus our attention on the spread of IT and also communications in the rural areas and remote areas. The private sector, obviously, is motivated by

profit making. They would like to serve areas where they can make money. They are not there with any social commitment. But, we, sitting in this House, and the Government of India cannot close our eyes to the vast and remote areas where under-privileged tribals and villagers live. They also need to be connected with the rest of the country, and before I end, I will end with a request that we should make special provisions for proper servicing of this less privileged section of the society and areas. Thank you, Madam.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I have to say something Mr. Nilotpal Basu. When you were making your speech, you did mention about the non-availability of the Annual Reports. Then, the hon. Minister made an enquiry about Reports. I have got a letter from the hon. Minister saying that on 17th March, 2003, 250 copies were sent to Rajya Sabha and 500 copies were sent to Lok Sabha and also to the Library.

SHRI NILOTPAL BASU: Which report?

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The Annual Report of Telecommunications ...(*Interruptions*)...

SHRI NILOTPAL BASU: I am saying that today's discussion involves three Annual Reports. The Report of the Department of Communications was available, but Reports of the Department of Posts and Information Technology were not available.

SHRI ARUN SHOURIE: I will clarify. It is about the Department of Posts that copies of Reports were sent on 17th March. A copy for acknowledgement was also sent to hon. Deputy Chairperson ...(*Interruptions*)...

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I have been sent. ...(*Interruptions*)...Hon. Minister is not wrong. There is some communication gap. ...(*Interruptions*)...

SHRI NILOTPAL BASU: The Annual Report of the IT Department was not available. ...(*Interruptions*)...

SHRI ARUN SHOURIE: I agree with you. It is not by way of any quarrel at all. It is just to clarify that Annual Reports of the Telecommunications Department and Posts Department were given on 17th March and sent here. I will frankly tell you that we were told that this particular discussion would take place around 30th or after that, and therefore, we had sought time for 27th to place the IT Annual Report on the Table of the House. That is the problem. We want to be helpful in this regard.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I have got all the three Annual Reports. My enquiry is correct. ...*(Interruptions)*...

SHRI NILOTPAL BASU: My only point is that when we adjourned for inter-Session ...*(Interruptions)*...

SHRI ARUN SHOURIE: There is no quarrel on that...*(Interruptions)*... It is our duty to give Reports. ...*(Interruptions)*...

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: There is no quarrel. ...*(Interruptions)*...

SHRI ARUN SHOURIE: Two of them, it so happens, had been given. ...*(Interruptions)*...

SHRI NILOTPAL BASU: I also faithfully reported by an experienced...*(Interruptions)*...In respect of the Department of Posts, you must make an enquiry. ...*(Interruptions)*...

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I am trying to get the records checked for the sake of House. ...*(Interruptions)*...As soon as I received the message from the hon. Minister; I asked one of my staff to go and find out. The Annual Reports of Department of Posts for 2002 and The Department of Communication were sent on the 17th. The third Report, which was slated to come on 27th - the copies have come - was distributed later on. So, part of the Reports were available and part of the Reports came today. ...*(Interruptions)*...

SHRI NILOTPAL BASU: The quarrel is not there. But the only point that we are making is that the linkage that is being made with the

actual scheduling of the discussion and availability of Reports is misplaced. ...*(Interruptions)*...

SHRI PRITHVIRAJ CHAVAN: In future when the Business Advisory Committee decides the Ministries to be taken up for discussion, respective Ministries should make sure that reports reach immediately, not at the time when the actual discussion takes place. ...*(Interruptions)*...

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I tell you as to what happened. ...*(Interruptions)*...

SHRI PRITHVIRAJ CHAVAN: What is the point of discussing a Ministry, if reports are not available?

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The discussion was preponed. ...*(Interruptions)*...

SHRI NILOTPAL BASU: There is no linkage between the actual holding of the discussion and the availability of Reports. As and when the BAC makes it very clear in the presence of the Parliamentary Affairs Minister that such and such Ministries would be taken up, Reports should be available well in advance.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We will take care of it in future. We will make the office also responsible.

SHRI K. RAMA MOHANA RAO (Andhra Pradesh): Madam, at the outset, I am indebted to you for having allowed me to express views on the working of Ministry of Communication and Information Technology. At the same time, I would like to congratulate Shri Nilotpal Basu for initiating a discussion on the functioning of this Ministry. I consider this Ministry as the 'nervous system' of our country because all the Departments under this Ministry have a direct contact with people.

Madam, I begin with the Department of Posts. I agree that India possesses one of the most extensive postal networks in the world, with more than 1,55,000 post offices in the country, about 1,40,000 situated in the rural areas. And on an average, each post office caters to the needs of about 22 kms. of area and over 6,600 inhabitants. Our postal system is

providing 38 services, which can broadly be divided into three categories - communications, transportation and other services, which includes resource mobilisation and Postal Life Insurance. Madam, we should be glad that we have the largest postal network in the world. We should also be glad that the population and the area covered by each one of our post offices is reasonably good. But, when it comes to quality, speed, commitment, professionalism and technology, I am constrained to say that I cannot commend our postal system because not even in a single area, our postal network stands first in the world.

Coming to the financial aspect, the total outlay for the Eighth Five Year Plan for this Department was Rs. 401 crores and its actual expenditure was Rs. 368 crores. The utilization was about 91 per cent. The outlay for the Ninth Five Year Plan was Rs. 507 crores and the actual expenditure was Rs. 392 crores. The utilization was about 77 per cent. In the Tenth Five Year Plan, the outlay has been Rs. 1350 crores. The allocation in the first year of the Tenth Plan was Rs. 150 crores and the utilization was much less. So, if you look at the graph of your expenditure since the Eighth Plan, it is going down. Why is it happening like this? What are the problems that the Department is facing? In the same way, if you look at the revenue-expenditure graph, it clearly shows that the revenue is to the tune of Rs. 37,000 million and the expenditure is Rs. 52,000 million. So, there is a whooping gap of Rs. 15,000 million. I would like the hon. Minister to explain this.

Now, I come to the performance of some of the schemes that are being operated by the Department. Computerization of post offices is very important to increase the revenue and provide best facilities to the customers. But, look how many post offices have been computerised in the country. The Department was able to computerise only 506 head post offices and 1266 sub-post offices. There are thousands of post offices yet to be computerised. Why is there so much delay in computerization when you have enough funds? Why is computerization going on at a snail's pace? I would like to know from the hon. Minister as to what his Department, in coordination with the NIC, is doing in the Tenth Five Year Plan to computerise all the post offices. The other point is, why is the Ministry not opening up computerized post offices in the country? I would like to know whether the Ministry has got any criteria for computerization of the post offices in the country. If 'yes', what is the criteria that has

been adopted and how is the Ministry thinking of completing computerization of post offices in Andhra Pradesh for 2003-04?

Madam, if you look at the traffic, it is also not up to the expectations. The inward foreign parcel traffic has come down by 4 per cent and the value of money orders transmitted has also come down by 4.21 per cent. Does it not hamper your revenue and, ultimately, the whole functioning of the Department? At the same time, look at the private people and see how they are flourishing. The Department, in spite of having vast infrastructure network and manpower, is failing to compete with private people. So, I would like to know what action plan does the Ministry have to compete with private and corporate players and restore its lost glory. Then, the quality of your Speed Post-- the flagship of your services-- is also in shambles. The House is very well aware that you cannot expect a Speed Post to reach before three days, which is, otherwise, supposed to reach within 24 to 36 hours. I need not cite any instances here. It is an open secret and is known to everybody. The next point is that the Department of Posts has about 800 plots lying vacant in prime locations of major urban areas of the country. But they are all just lying idle. In fact, some plots have also been encroached upon. I fail to understand as to what your Circle Offices, which have a direct control over those plots, are doing. When you are not getting revenue through various activities and services of your department, why don't you think of commercially exploiting the prime lands that are available with you? The other problem is, on the one hand, you have prime lands in cities and on the other, many offices are running on rented buildings! I don't understand the rationale behind this. For example, in Hyderabad, you are running your offices in two or three huge private buildings by paying huge monthly rents. This is only one example. If you have your own building, then you can reduce your expenditure and even let out some portion of it and earn revenue. So, I request the hon. Minister to ponder over this issue seriously and do something in this regard, in coordination with the Ministry of Urban Development and other agencies.

The next point is, you have so many new schemes in the Tenth Five Year Plan, for example, E-Post, National Data Centre, Computerization of International Mail Processing, etc. I would like to know from the hon. Minister as to what allocation has been made for the new schemes proposed in the Tenth Plan, and whether any time-frame has

been fixed by which these schemes can be completed. The other point is, we are in the second year of the Tenth Plan, but still, not even a single scheme has been started. And, if you look at the allocation made for these schemes, it is minuscule. So, under these circumstances, how is the Ministry planning to complete these schemes within the next three years?

Now, I come to the Postal Life Insurance Scheme. The working of this Scheme is not at all satisfactory. Your percentage of achievement in the Ninth Plan is just 45 per cent. We have to improve it. I understand that the Ministry has constituted an Expert Committee to study the potential of Postal Life Insurance (PLI) and Rural Postal Life Insurance (RPLI) in the country. The House would like to know the outcome of the study. Then, I wish to know how the Ministry is thinking of rationalizing various subsidies that have been given to various services. At the end of one year in office, the Prime Minister had announced that letter boxes would be set up in villages with a population of 300 or more. I wish to know how many such letter boxes have so far been set up in the country during the last three years, with a particular reference to Andhra Pradesh. The House would also like to know what blood you have infused in the Panchayati Sanchar Sewa Kendras so as to increase the availability of stamps and stationery in rural areas.

Madam, with your permission, now, I come to Telecommunications. First of all, I congratulate the hon. Minister, who is an erudite scholar and is running his Ministry with great guns in the field of communications. India has become the pioneer on the communications front. But still, we have to go a long way in realizing our dreams and targets. So, recognizing the fact that provision of world-class telecommunications, infrastructure and information are the tools for a rapid socio-economic development of the country, we have envisaged the new Telecom Policy in 1999. In pursuance of this policy, the Government has prepared the Communication Convergence Bill, 2001, keeping in view the rapid convergence of telecommunications, computers, television and electronics; and it is before us for approval. In spite of taking all these steps, there are some basic problems that are being faced by the consumers. I would just like to highlight some of them.

I was going through the Budget proposals of this department. The Budget Estimates for Wireless Planning Coordination for 2001-02 was Rs. 32.66 crores, and was enhanced to Rs. 101 crores in the Budget Estimates of 2002-03. But, at the Revised Estimates stage, this has been reduced to Rs. 38.62 crores. And again, for 2003-04, the Budget Estimates has been increased to Rs. 137 crores. I failed to understand the reasons behind this glaring fluctuation. The Wireless Planning and Coordination functions as a radio regulatory agency and responsible for radio frequency spectrum management and other related activities, including giving licenses for establishment, operation and maintenance of wireless stations in the country. It is very important. You just see the oscillation in allocation to this important proposal. This is only one example I am giving. There are many such proposals which need the attention of the hon. Minister.

Madam, if you look at the Annual Report of the Ministry, it will be clear that in December, 2002, 85 per cent of the villages have been covered with Village Public Telephones. Out of that, 99 per cent have been covered by the PSUs and only one per cent has been covered by the private people. The hon. Minister has been saying, time and again, that if the private people do not come forward for establishing VPTs, he would take drastic measures against them. But, so far, no steps have been taken against the defaulters. Take, for example, the number of VPTs committed by the private players, from the effective date, during the first three years. It is 9,653. But, as of February, 2003, the private players have provided only 1,314 VPTs! This is only one example I am giving. They have not set up even a minimum number of VPTs in many States. Why is the Ministry not able to put pressure on the private people to go to villages rather than concentrating on the urban areas?

Apart from this, there are more than 22 lakh people in the country, who are waiting for telephone connections. And the major portion of this waiting list is in the rural areas. Due to the non-entry of private people, the people living in the rural areas are facing a lot of problems. So, what specific measures is the Ministry initiating to reduce the waiting list to the minimum extent possible during the year 2003-04?

Coming to the fault rates, I congratulate the hon. Minister on bringing down the fault rate from 19 per hundred in 1991-92 to 12.5 per

hundred in 2001-02. But, still, it stands at a higher side when compared to other advanced countries of the world, and the technology that we are using here. And, it is also higher looking at the advancement in technology and competition that is coming from the private people. Hence, I request the hon. Minister to bring down the fault rate to a single digit level in 2003-04. Madam, I wish to say a lot more things on cellular telephone services and the WLL, but since the time that has been allocated to me is very limited, I do not wish to go into the details. I would only request the hon. Minister to explain the recent controversy between the cellular operators and the limited mobility operators and the recent cellular operators move to knock at the doors of the TDSAT.

The National Telecom Policy envisages for providing world-class telecom services at a reasonable price. But, instead of providing a reasonable world-class telecom services you have increased the tariff, which is affecting millions of your customers in the country. Are the 256-line exchanges and the 565-line exchanges set up in the rural areas really providing world-class telecom services envisaged in the Policy? No, they are not providing. There are so many shortcomings. Hence, I request the hon. Minister to pay attention to these shortcomings.

Madam, I have a few points on IT. We all know that India has emerged as a leader in the field of software and software services in the world. Our competitive advantage in the software business is well known due to cost-effectiveness, world-class quality, high reliability, speedy delivery, and all these are powered by the state-of-the-art technology. Last year's growth in software is about Rs.60,000 crores, *i.e.* 26 per cent higher than the previous year, and the exports touching nearly Rs.50,000 crores. In spite of a slump in the international market, our software sector is reasonably doing well. But, the recent hiccups and the treatment meted out to our software engineers in other countries of the world is a cause for concern. I do not wish to go into the details. I hope the hon. Minister would have taken appropriate steps to protect the interests of our software professionals in other countries.

Then, I welcome the initiative taken by the Ministry for formulating Vidya Vahini and Gyan Vahini Programmes to provide IT infrastructure in schools and in higher learning institutions of the country. This will definitely, give a fillip to lay the foundation and improve the

qualify education in the country. I would like to know from the hon. Minister as to how many schools have so far been identified in 2002-03 and to how many schools you are going to extend this in the year 2003-04 in the State of Andhra Pradesh.

Madam, the National Task Force on IT and Software Development and NASSCOM-McKinsey study set a target of US$ 50 billion for 2008 and a total market share of US$ 87 billion. How the Ministry, with the on-going recession, is going to achieve this ambitious target set for IT industry?

Finally, I would like to know from the hon. Minister as to how many Software Technology Parks in the country have been established so far and what encouragement that the Ministry is giving to these Parks so as to function effectively and come up to the expectations.

Madam, these are some of the issues which I thought I should bring to the notice of the hon. Minister. I request him to respond to these queries. I also request the hon. Minister to ponder over the suggestions that I have made and take action which, I am sure, will help the Ministry in moving ahead in the right direction. Thank you.

श्री शाहिद सिद्दिकी (उत्तर प्रदेश) : मैडम डिप्टी चेयरमैन, मैं आपका बहुत शुक्रगुजार हूं कि आपने मुझे बोलने का मौका दिया। पिछले 10-12 साल में इन्फर्मेशन टैक्नोलोजी में जो एक क्रांति आई है, उसका पूरी दुनिया में प्रभाव पड़ा है। खास तौर पर जो थर्ड वर्ल्ड के कंट्रीज़ हैं, जहां पर कि परिवर्तन बहुत तेजी से नहीं हो पा रहा था, वहां इन्फर्मेशन टैक्नोलोजी के द्वारा परिवर्तन लाने का आज एक मौका मिला है। इस टैक्नोलोजी का प्रयोग करके, गांव में, देहात में, जहां पर नॉलेज नहीं पहुंच पा रहा था और जिसकी वजह से पिछड़ापन था, उसको दूर करने का आज एक अवसर मिला है। आज जब हम कहते हैं कि भारत एक आईटी सुपर पॉवर बनने जा रहा है, तो मैं राजीव गांधी जी का नाम लिए बिना नहीं रह सकता जिन्होंने कि हमें इस क्रांति के रास्ते पर डाला, चाहे वह कम्युनिकेशन के मैदान में हो, चाहे वह इन्फर्मेशन टैक्नोलोजी के मैदान में हो। अगर उनका विज़न न होता और जिस रास्ते पर वे लेकर चले थे, उस रास्ते पर लेकर न चलते तो आज हम गर्व से यह न कह पाते कि आज हिन्दुस्तान बहुत आगे जा चुका है। शायद हम इस मैदान में भी पीछे रह जाते। इसलिए मैं राजीव गांधी जी को इस मौके पर याद करूंगा। लेकिन वह विज़न उस वक्त एक विज़न था। आज मैं यह जानना चाहता हूं कि क्या विज़न है? आज हम एक पॉवर बने हैं। लेकिन कब तक हम यह पॉवर रहेंगे? एक बड़ा सवाल हमारे सामने यह है कि रिसर्च के ऊपर जो हमें ध्यान देना चाहिए, इन्फर्मेशन टैक्नोलोजी के फील्ड में, डिजिटल क्रांति के फील्ड में जो आने वाले ट्रेंड्ज़ हैं, उन पर हम कितना ध्यान केन्द्रित कर रहे हैं? हम अगले पांच

साल के लिए क्या प्लानिंग कर रहे हैं, अगले दस के लिए क्या प्लानिंग कर रहे हैं, अगले 15 साल के लिए हम क्या प्लानिंग कर रहे हैं, हमें यह देखना होगा। अगर हम अगले पांच साल की, दस साल की या पन्द्रह साल की प्लानिंग को लेकर नहीं चलेंगे तो शायद हम फिर इस रेस के अन्दर पिछड़ सकते हैं। इसमें बहुत ज्यादा स्मगनैस नहीं आनी चाहिए कि हम यह सोचें कि आईटी के मैदान में हम दूसरों से आगे चले गए हैं। इसलिए मेरा एहसास यह है कि जो इन्फर्मेशन टैक्नोलोजी की मिनिस्ट्री है उसमें रिसर्च के ऊपर ज्यादा ध्यान होना चाहिए और फंड्ज़ का ज्यादा एलोकेशन होना चाहिए, क्योंकि आने वाले जो ट्रेंड्ज़ हैं उनमें बहुत तेजी के साथ परिवर्तन हो रहा है। आपको पता है कि इन्फर्मेशन टैक्नोलोजी में हर रोज़ एक नया परिवर्तन आता है, एक नई क्रांति आती है। आज जो चीज़ रैलेवेंट है, बहुत महत्वपूर्ण है, वह चीज़ अगले चंद हफ्तों में या चंद महीनों में या चंद सालों में इर-रैलेवेंट हो जाती है। इसलिए ट्रेंड्ज़ पर अगर नज़र नहीं होगी और आने वाले अवसरों के लिए हम तैयार नहीं होंगे तो हमारे लिए इसमें बहुत कठिनाइयां आ सकती हैं। इस मैदान में जो सब से महत्वपूर्ण चीज है और जिसमें हम आगे गए हैं, वह एजुकेशन है। यानी इन्फर्मेशन टैक्नोलोजी में जो एजुकेशन का मैदान है, जो एजुकेशन प्लानिंग है, उस पर बहुत ज्यादा ध्यान देने की जरूरत है। क्योंकि आज अगर हम या हमारे लोग यूनाइटेड स्टेट्स में जा कर काम कर रहे हैं या सॉफ्टवेयर के मैदान में फॉर ईस्ट में हम आगे हैं...। तो वह हमारे यहां एजुकेशन के मैदान में आगे गए, उस की वजह से है । लेकिन मुझे लगता है कि इस एजुकेशन में प्लानिंग नहीं हो रही है क्योंकि 5-10 सालों में इनफॉर्मेशन एंड टैक्नॉलोजी में बहुत तेजी से परिवर्तन आया है और किन फील्ड्स में किस तरह के लोगों की जरूरत है, आने वाले दिनों में क्या आवश्यकताएं हैं, अगर हम इस सब की जानकारी लेकर नहीं चलेंगे तो हमारा जो यूथ है जिस की बहुत आशाएं हैं, जो सपने देखकर इनफॉर्मेशन टैक्नॉलोजी के रास्ते को अपना रहा है, उस को बहुत डिसअपांइटमेंट हो सकती है । इसलिए चैयरमेन साहिबा मैं मंत्री जी से दरख्वास्त करूंगा कि इस बारे में बहुत ध्यान दें और उस की स्टडी की जाए ।

दूसरी बात, मैं कहना चाहूंगा कि एक वक्त था कि हम लोग लिटरेसी के मैदान में आगे आने की कोशिश कर रहे थे और अपने देश को लिटरेट बनाने की कोशिश कर रहे थे । उस में तो हम जिस तरह से आगे बढ़ना चाहिए था, नहीं बढ़ पाए । हम देश को लिटरेट नहीं बना पाए । मैं कहूंगा कि पिछले 50 वर्षों में उस क्षेत्र में हमें जिस तरह से आगे बढ़ना चाहिए था, हम नहीं बढ़ पाए, लेकिन अब दूसरी लिटरेसी का सवाल आ गया है। आज कम्प्यूटर लिटरेसी का सवाल आ गया है । इस क्षेत्र में पिछले 10-12 सालों में हम बहुत तेजी से आगे बढ़े हैं, लेकिन मुझे बड़ा डर यह है कि जो डिजिटल डिवाइड है, वह देश के अंदर बहुत तेजी से बढ़ता चला जा रहा है और यह डिजिटल डिवाइड सिर्फ रूरल और अर्बन नहीं है, यह डिजिटल डिवाइड रीजनल भी है । कुछ रीजंस और कुछ स्टेट्स ऐसे हैं जो आई0टी0 के मैदान में, डिजिटल के मैदान में बहुत आगे बढ़े हैं । चाहे कर्नाटक हो, चाहे आंध्र प्रदेश हो, मैं वहां की सरकारों को बधाई देना चाहता हूं, लेकिन कुछ इलाके ऐतिहासिक कारणों से, एजुकेशन का डवलपमेंट न होने की वजह से या जियोग्राफिकल और दूसरे कारणों से आगे नहीं बढ़ पाए हैं । नॉर्थ इंडिया में ज्यादातर स्टेट्स जैसे उत्तर प्रदेश है, बिहार है, मध्य प्रदेश है या राजस्थान है, आई0टी0 के मैदान में वहां जो डवलपमेंट होना चाहिए था, वह नहीं हो पाया है । इस को अगर हम सिर्फ उन स्टेट्स के ऊपर छोड़ देंगे तो मैं समझता हूं कि आने

वाले समय मे इस से डिजिटल डिवाइड बढ़ेगा, इकॉनोमिक डिवाइड भी बढ़ेगा, फ्रस्ट्रेशन बढ़ेगा और दूसरे मसले भी बढ़ेगे । इस को पाटने के लिए हमें मल्टी-लेयर्ड अप्रोच करनी पड़ेगी । एक तरफ तो हमे रूरल-अर्बन डिवाइड को खत्म करना होगा क्योंकि यह डिवाइड पहले से ही बहुत ज्यादा थी, अब वह डिवाइड बहुत तेजी से आगे बढ़ रही है । दूसरे, रीजनल डिवाइड को खत्म करने के लिए हमे काम करना पड़ेगा । तीसरे जो हमारी इकॉनोमिक डिस्पैरिटीज हैं, वे डिजिटल डिवाइड से मिटाई भी जा सकती हैं । इस डिवाइड को मिटाने के लिए हम क्वांटम जम्प ले सकते हैं । लेकिन यह डिवाइड बढ़ भी सकती है और जो देश की सूरते हाल है, उस मे यह डिवाइड ज्यादा बढ़ रही है । चाहे दलित हो, चाहे पिछड़े हो या चाहे माइनॉरिटीज हो, यानी जो सोसायटी के डिप्राइव्ड सेक्शंस हैं, वह आई0टी0 के मैदान मे, डिजिटल मैदान में आगे नहीं आ पा रहे हैं । उस में वे ज्यादा आगे जा रहे हैं जिन के पास पहले से शिक्षा है, आर्थिक साधन हैं, प्रिविलेज है और डायरेक्शन देने वाले साधन हैं । तो इस डिवीजन को मिटाने के लिए अगर काम नही हुआ तो काफी दिक्कते हमारे लिए आ सकती हैं । इस मैदान मे मिनिस्ट्री ऑफ ह्यूमन रिसोर्सेस ने कुछ काम किया है । मैं इस बारे मे एक तरफ खास तवज्जुह दिलाना चाहूंगा कि जो हमारे मदरसे हैं, उन्हे हम इस से इग्नोर नही कर सकते । वह लड़ाई हमे उन मदरसो से लड़नी है । हम उस काम को उन्हे इनवॉलव कर के कर सकते हैं । वहां पर आई0टी0 बहुत ही महत्वपूर्ण रोल कर सकती है । मैं ने आज से 10-12 साल पहले कई जगह तजुर्बे किए हैं । मैं ने एक-दो मदरसों मे इनफॉर्मेशन टैक्नॉलोजी के इंस्टीट्यूट शुरू कराए थे और मेरा तजुर्बा यह हुआ कि जिन्हे हम समझते हैं कि वे बगैर पढ़े लिखे हैं, वेस्टर्न एजुकेशन और इंग्लिश एजुकेशन नही जानते हैं, उन्होने आई0टी0 को बहुत तेजी से अपनाया । मैं तो उन के इतनी तेजी से अपनाने से हैरान हुआ । इसलिए मैं मंत्री महोदय से कहना चाहूंगा कि इस मैदान में भी आप को खास तौर पर ध्यान देने की जरूरत है । उस के लिए फंड्स एलोकेट करने की जरूरत है, उस के लिए स्पेशल सेल बनाने की जरूरत है जो कि उस डिजिटल डिवाइड को मिटाने के लिए तेजी से काम कर सके । हमारा पोस्ट एंड टैलिग्राफ का जो डिपार्टमेंट है, डिप्टी-चैयरमेन साहिबा, मैं आप की तवज्जुह दिलाना चाहूंगा कि एक वक्त था कि डाकिए की समाज मे बड़ी इज्जत होती थी । समाज का एक महत्वपूर्ण अंग होता था, गांव के अंदर, देहात के अंदर हर जगह पर उसका महत्व था, लेकिन आज वह चीज खत्म होती जा रही है।

उपसभापति : आप पास्ट टेन्स में क्यो बात कर रहे हैं? वे तो अभी भी हैं, न?

श्री शाहिद सिद्दिकी : मैडम, आज पोस्टमेन की वह हैसियत नही है, जो माजी में होती थी। डिप्टी चेयरमेन साहिबा, मैं आपके माध्यम से मंत्री जी से यह कहना चाह रहा हूँ कि इसको दुबारा रीइन्वेंट करने की जरूरत है। गांव, देहात के अंदर, बड़े बड़े कस्बों के अंदर पोस्ट-आफिसो को रीइन्वेंट करने की जरूरत है। उसे दुबारा डिजिटल क्रांति केन्द्र बनाने की जरूरत है, साइबर कैफे बनाने की वहां जरूरत है। पहले वहां पोस्ट आफिसो में जितना कारोबार होता था, जितने लोग वहां जाते थे, उसमें हम बहुत नीचे चले गए हैं। लेकिन, वहां आज भी प्रोपर्टी हैं, उनको रन कर रहे हैं, अगर वहां साइबर कैफे बनें, अगर डिजिटल डिवाइड मिटाने के लिए वहां पर शाम के वक्त उन पोस्ट आफिसों में, उन इमारतो मे ट्रेनिंग के इंतजाम किए जा सके तो काफी अच्छा होगा और जो वहां पोस्टमास्टर हैं वे गांव के लोगो

को, किसानो को इंटरनेट के जरिए जानकारी उपलब्ध करा सके तो मैं समझता हूँ कि यह क्रांति लाने में हमारे पोस्ट आफिस बहुत बड़ा रोल अदा कर सकते हैं। इसलिए हमे इन पोस्ट-आफिसों के मामले को रीइन्वेंट करने की जरूरत है।

मैडम, स्पीड पोस्ट के बारे में अभी बात हो रही थी। मैं इस बारे मे यह कहना चाहूंगा कि जो हमारी स्पीड पोस्ट है वह सबसे सस्ती है। दूसरे प्राइवेट सेक्टर मे जो स्पीड पोस्ट का काम हो रहा है, वे तीन गुना, चार गुना ज्यादा पैसा लेते हैं। इसलिए पोस्ट एंड टेलीग्राफ डिपार्टमेंट की स्पीड पोस्ट सेवा, खासतौर पर विदेश मे कोई पैकेट भेजना हो, चाहे अमरीका मे या कही दूसरे देश में भेजना हो तो वह तकरीबन प्राइवेट सेक्टर से एक-चौथाई सस्ती है। लेकिन, उसकी मार्केटिंग नहीं हो रही है, उसको प्राइवेट सेक्टर के पास ले जाने की कोशिश नही हो रही है। सिर्फ प्राइवेटाइजेशन करने से काम नहीं बनेगा क्योंकि इससे लाखों लोगो की नौकरियां जुड़ी हुई हैं, लाखो लोगो की जिंदगी जुड़ी हुई है। आप अगर सिर्फ आंख बंद करके प्राइवेटाइजेशन करते चले जाएंगे तो उससे काम होने वाला नही है। मैं कहना यह चाहता हूँ कि स्पीड पोस्ट के मामले में, चाहे आप उसकी मार्केटिंग प्राइवेटाइज कर दीजिए, जो स्पीड पोस्ट हमारे पोस्ट एंड टेलीग्राफ डिपार्टमेंट के द्वारा होता है उसकी मार्केटिंग को आप प्राइवेटाइज कर दीजिए, कुछ प्राइवेट लोगो को कमीशन के द्वारा उसको दे दीजिए कि जो बड़ी बड़ी कंपनी हैं, जो अमरीका में, युरोप में, दूसरी जगह पर अपने पैकेट या अपने सामान भेजती हैं, वहां पर जाकर उसको इंडीविजुअली कैनवास करने और मार्केट करने की कोशिश करे। एक मार्केटिंग डिवीजन, मुझे पता नहीं कि इस समय मौजूद है या नहीं है, किन्तु उसे स्ट्रेन्थन करने की जरूरत है। पोस्ट एंड टेलीग्राफ डिपार्टमेंट का अपना एक मार्केटिंग डिवीजन होना चाहिए और वह भी बिल्कुल मोडर्न पैटर्न पर होना चाहिए। चूंकि मैं अखबार से जुड़ा हुआ हूँ, मैं देखता हूँ कि जो हमारा स्पीड पोस्ट का सिस्टम है, उसमे कही कोई खामी नजर नहीं आती है प्राइवेट सेक्टर के मुकाबले मे। यह उतना ही बढ़िया है, लेकिन प्रोपर्ली मार्केटिंग की जरूरत है।

मैडम, हमारे पोस्ट एंड टेलीग्राफ डिपार्टमेंट में जो वर्कर हैं, हम लोग उनकी बात नहीं करते, उनकी बात नही सोचते। आज उनकी बात सोचने की जरूरत है। मेरी जानकारी मे ऐसा है कि वहां हजारो ऐसे वर्कर हैं, जिनको एक्स्ट्रा डिपार्टमेंटल वर्कर कहते हैं, जो तीस-तीस साल से काम कर रहे हैं, डेढ़-डेढ़ सौ, दो-दो सौ, ढाई-ढाई सौ रुपए तनख्वाह पर काम कर रहे हैं, उन्हें कभी परमानेंट नहीं किया जाता है और न कोई फैसिलिटी दी जाती है। उस ओर भी सरकार को ध्यान देने की जरूरत है और जो ऐसे वर्कर को, पोस्टमेन को इज्जत मिली हुई थी उसे दुबारा दिलाने की जरूरत है।

मैडम, इसी के साथ ही मैं यह भी कहना चाहूंगा कि यह जो डिजिटल क्रांति आज आई है, इसको हरित क्रांति के साथ, किसान के साथ जोड़ने की जरूरत है। किसान के लिए इससे बड़ा आसान होगा, अगर हम उसे इसके साथ जोड़ दें। जो उसकी फसल से जुड़ी समस्याएं हैं, खेती-बाड़ी से जुड़ी समस्याएं हैं, उनके लिए किसान इंटरनेट के माध्यम से किसी भी एंग्रीकल्चर इंस्टीट्यूट से, जैसे पूसा या दूसरी इंस्टीट्यूट के जो एक्सपर्ट हैं उनसे जानकारी ले सकता है। अगर यह सुविधा हम गांवों में, पंचायतों में दे सकें, वहां इंटरनेट

पहुंचाने की कोशिश करे यानि पंचायत के अंदर या फिर पोस्ट-आफिस के अंदर इस तरह के कम्प्युटर मौजूद हों, इंटरनेट मौजूद हो कि वहां पर किसान जाकर जानकारी ले सके और अगर वह यूज न कर सकता हो तो वहां पर कोई उसको इस्तेमाल करने वाला हो ताकि वह इंटरनेट के माध्यम से एग्रीकल्चर इंस्टीट्यूट से संपर्क कर सके और अपनी समस्याओं के बारे में इंटरएक्टिव काम कर सके । अभी तक जैसे टीवी पर होता है कि किसान भाइयो के लिए कार्यक्रम होता है, मगर वह इंटरएक्टिव नही होता क्योंकि बात होने के बाद वहां बात खत्म हो जाती है। उसको कौन सी खाद इस्तेमाल करनी है, कौन सी खाद उसकी मिट्टी के लिए बेहतर है, कौन से बीज के साथ क्या परिवर्तन आ रहे हैं, कौन सी नई कॉटन आ रही है, उसमे अंतर्राष्ट्रीय लैवल पर क्या परिवर्तन हो रहे हैं, यह सब जानने मे, यह क्रांति लाने में आई0टी0 बहुत बड़ा रोल अदा कर सकती है, लेकिन इसमें थोड़ी ऐप्रोच बदलने की जरूरत है। इसको गरीब की तरफ, किसान की तरफ मोड़ने की जरूरत है क्योकि यह होगा तो हम इस देश मे क्रांति ला पाएंगे। हम अगर सिर्फ एक्सपोर्ट करने के लिए आई0टी0 को यूज़ करेंगे और डिजिटल क्रांति को यूज़ करेंगे तो मैं नही समझता कि इससे कोई बहुत बड़ा ऐचीवमेंट होने वाला है, लेकिन अगर हमने डिजिटल और आई0टी0 टैक्नोलॉजी को देश के अंदर क्रांति लाने के लिए, कृषि के अंदर क्रांति लाने के लिए, आर्थिक क्षेत्र मे क्रांति लाने के लिए, शिक्षा मे क्रांति लाने के लिए प्रयोग किया और इसके लिए इन्नोवेटिव प्रोग्राम हम लाए तो मुझे यकीन है कि देश का चेहरा बदलने मे, नक्शा बदलने मे अगले दस साल में हम कामयाब हो जाएंगे। फिर जैसा हमारे प्रधानमंत्री जी ने कहा है कि हम एक करोड़ लोगो को नौकरियां देंगे, नौकरियां कहां से आएंगी? नौकरियां सारी आई0टी0 सैक्टर मे आने वाली हैं। आने वाले समय में 70 प्रतिशत नौकरियां आई0टी0 सैक्टर मे आने वाली हैं। तो उसके लिए अगर प्रापर हमारी ऐप्रोच नहीं होगी, हमारी प्लानिंग नहीं होगी तो हम ये नौकरियां नही दे पाएंगे और हम कहीं पीछे हटते चले जाएंगे, पिछड़ते चले जाएंगे और इसके नुकसान का पता हमें आने वाले समय में लगेगा। इसलिए मेरा कहना है कि श्री राजीव गांधी हमे जो दे गए थे, हम उससे ऊपर छलांग लगाने की कोशिश करें, वहां रुक जाने की हम कोशिश न करें।

यही मेरी आपसे विनती है, बहुत-बहुत शुक्रिया। धन्यवाद।

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN : Before I call Shri S. S. Chandran to speak, I would request Shri Balkavi Bairagi to come on the Chair and relieve me. बालकवि बैरागी जी, आप जरा मुझे रिलीव करेंगे। अगर हाऊस की अनुमति हो तो आप कृपया चेयर पर आएं। आइए।

[THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI BALKAVI BAIRAGI) in the Chair]

*SHRI S.S.CHANDRAN (Tamil Nadu): Mr. Vice Chairman, Sir, I rise to put forth my views on the working of the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology on behalf of AIADMK. Today,

* English Translation of the speech delivered in Tamil.

Communication has come to mean cell phone. Such is the growth of communication in the country. We cannot deny that there are many good aspects in the Telecom Policy announced in the year 1999. One of the aspects was to provide telephone connection on demand. It is a fact that Government has provided telephone connections on demand in several places in the country. But I request the Hon. Minister to include one more point in the Telecom Policy. That is to declare that telephones would function at least for 15 days a month. When we enquire about the health of people, they here things well. But when we ask about the money they owe they don't hear us. Such is the situation today. People think whether the Government is doing this so that the people will turn to cell phones. The Telecom policy also declared that telephone connections would be provided to all the villages by the year 2002. I request the Hon'ble Minister to tell the House, how much has been done on this. I know there are still many villages that have not been connected. In villages where phones have been installed, many of them do not function.

While talking about communication we have to refer to Postal Department. There were just 23,344 post offices in the country at the time of independence. But today it has grown about seven-fold and now we have 1,55,279 post offices. Since post is still the familiar mode of communication in rural areas, I request the Hon. Minister to take steps to set up post offices in all the gram panchayats in the country. I say this because now we have one post office for 21.17 sq. kilometers, that is to say just one for 6614 persons. It was said that EDOBs would be set up in all the village panchayats. I would like to know how for this has been done. There are many class IV employees known as EDs, who have not been regularised for years. These extra departmental employees are the backbone of the rural postal system. I appeal to the Hon'ble Minister to take steps to regularise the extra departmental employees.

There is no gainsaying the fact that IT industry has grown in India by leaps and bounds. It is also a fact that there are just about 37 lakh PCs in India. But it is a matter of pride that next to the US, it is India that has the maximum software professionals. The tycoon of Computer Software industry, Bill Gates said once 'Computer has no place in a country where majority people do not earn more than a dollar a day'. I appreciate the Government for proving this view wrong through Gyandoot scheme meant for the rural people. Such schemes should be

implemented all over the country. The Task Force on IT for the masses has opined that it should be utilised for the benefit of 40% people who live below the poverty line. This should be the approach of the Government.

It is the State of Tamil Nadu that came out with a separate IT policy first in the country. This was announced by the Hon. Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu Dr. Puratchi Thalaivi in 2002. The software export of Tamil Nadu grew from Rs.393 crore in 1997-98 to Rs.5,223 crore in 2001-2002. Tamil Nadu Government is introducing software in Tamil to reach applications and other things to the rural people. I wish to make a specific request to the Hon.Minister. Steps should be taken to make software in Indian languages to reach the masses. The situation wherein the knowledge of English is necessary to reap the benefit of IT should change. Then alone the masses will be benefited and country can progress. With these words I conclude.

SHRI ASHWANI KUMAR (Punjab): Thank you, Mr. Vice-Chairman, Sir, for giving me an opportunity of expressing my views on a matter of great importance. The information and telecom regime in this country is widely perceived as the bedrock of our economic progress which, I have no hesitation in saying, would eventually inure to the competitive advantages of India as an economy. I must start by complimenting the nation, as a whole, and also the Government for the bold initiatives that it took in the form of the recent policy announcements and the Budgetary reliefs in both these sectors. My esteemed colleagues, who preceded me in this debate, have churned out many relevant figures which, definitely, point to the rapid advance in the I.T. sector of our economy and in the telecommunications development in the country. Sir, as far as the telecom sector is concerned, it is quite away, from 1881, when we had our first telecom line established in Kolkata. Sir, the country today boasts of 35,023 telephone exchanges, a total equipped switching capacity of 46.66 million fixed lines and 44.96 million working telephones; certainly, no mean achievement for a country which had its first telephone in 1881. In this entire revolution, if one were to trace the history, the real strides were made post-1991, when the earlier Congress (I) Government took the initiative to open up the economy and to ensure that we integrated ourselves with the global telecom and I.T. infrastructure. Sir, the underlying premise or the burden of my representation and presentation

this afternoon, is that while we have creditable advances to our credit, while our progress, by certain standards, is enviable, -- and I would gladly admit that if there is one area in which India, as a country, and the citizens of India, as a nation, have enjoyed the benefit of reform and technology, it is the telecommunications, the infrastructure and the I.T. sector -- but, at the same time, I am not unmindful of the fact, that in a nation of 1 billion people whose future prosperity, dignity of its individuals, our pride as a nation in the Comity of Nations, would depend in a very significant way on how we build upon our initial successes in the I.T. and the telecom sector. Mr. Minister, you are indeed very fortunate to be presiding over, probably, the most significant revolution that we are seeing in this country post-Independence. History would doubtless recall the bold initiatives which were called upon in the interests of the country to ensure that the quantum leap that is so much a national imperative in the two sectors is indeed taken - the opportunity seized and not missed.

Mr. Minister, you have brought out excellent publications. I have benefited immensely from the Government publications, and I do not intend to take too much of the House's time in repeating the figures. But the figures do tell only a part of the truth. While we have seen the advances, while the citizens have received the benefits, we also see it from time to time -- perhaps, it has become a regular feature in the Yellow Pages in the country -- every single morning, on one count or the other, the telecom policy, all the initiatives taken pursuant to the guidelines of 2001, and the 1999 NPT, all the conventionalisation, all caught up in litigation. Sir, you know that litigation is often inspired. You know that litigation is a result of certain ambiguities and gaps in legislation. And, Sir, you also know that the litigation is on account of very high stakes involved. The Government and the Opposition have expressed concerns, but it is for the Government to take concrete steps to ensure that a very major fulcrum of India's economic development, the IT and the telecom sector, is not captive and hostage to the conscious and deliberate ambiguities of the law, to conscious and unconscious decisions taken that do not inspire confidence, to such decisions that at least on a *prima facie* basis have received a sympathetic ear from courts. Also, while I am on the subject, Sir, I must draw your attention, as I am duty-bound, to the often conflicting decisions of the regulatory authorities and also of the appellate tribunals. I will, of course, not comment on judicial decisions. But, I do believe, both as a lawyer and as a

parliamentarian, and above all, as a citizen of this country that there is a lot that needs to be addressed despite the significant progress that we have made. Sir, the first and foremost requirement is of ensuring that national policy is not prostituted by those who seek to benefit from it at the expense of the country as a whole, and is freed from ambiguities. And, Sir, it is in your power to do so. Through, this House, this nation would more than support any constructive initiative that you would bring forward, and now, there is enough basis for you to apply your mind to these ambiguities. There are, at least, three Supreme Court judgements, there are any number of High Court judgements and you have the TDSAT and the TRAI judgements. While as a lawyer, I can tell you, it is easy to find fault with the best of judgements, and it is easy to flaunt a red-herring and to cast aspersions, I am not standing here to do so. But as someone who has some understanding of the processes of the law, I would make bold to submit that it is time for us really to think and think hard. The year 2003 is going to be your year of test. You have achieved the fundamentals, but the success of the revolution will depend upon your ability to grasp that quantum leap, and that quantum leap, Sir, will not come with one Infosys or one Wipro. It will not even come with one Satyam and with one NIIT.. You would need to have hundreds of these giants, or mini-giants in India and it is in our power to create those giants, who would then take the world by storm. If you want the IT and telecom revolution in India to be globalised, you cannot do so on the backbone of the two companies and, I mean no disrespect to the two companies. We salute the two companies. They are one of our finest examples in corporate governance in achieving what it is in our hand to achieve, what it is in our capacity to achieve. But I ask the Minister one question, why is it that despite the onset of this revolution we still have no more than four major IT and telecom companies in the private sector? Sir, I must compliment the Government for setting up, on the IT side, some of the bilateral trade agreements. But Sir, I was a bit disappointed when I heard two countries where we have our flags flying ...These are Accra in Ghana, and Ulan Bator in Mongolia. We can do better. Sir, we could have a show-piece in London; we could have a show-piece in Paris; we could have a show-piece in China; we could have a show-piece in Japan. All these countries are here to learn, on the IT and on the telecom successes, from us. We can create our own BT. We can create, I am sure, a mini sun-microsystem in this country. But all that these companies have achieved so far has been possible for them to achieve

primarily on the strength of their own initiatives. I know that the Government has taken certain steps in facilitating the competitiveness of our industry, and in unbottling some of the bottlenecks. But, still, the fact remains I have seen in these Reports some broad initiatives. But I would like the Government of the day to be an active collaborator with our private companies. I would want this pariah system between the companies and the Government to go. This relationship has to be one of collaboration and cooperation so that we, as a nation, can celebrate in the successes of our corporates, and bask in the glory of what our corporates have been able to achieve. Sir, I would recommend you to please unfold a series of initiatives, maybe specific to companies, depending upon their levels of reach, their levels of competence, their levels of globalisation and so on. Having put in a word for more concrete, more solid assistance to our private companies, I would also like you very, very much -- and I say so with all the strength at my command -- not to dilute the public sector. BSNL has done an outstanding job. VSNL has everything in its means to be a global player. Do ensure that they become global players. Globalisation does not mean a systematic demolition of the public sector that has stood the test of time. Globalisation, liberalisation, competition and core competencies do not mean a denigration of the gains that the public sector has achieved and all its successes. I do know, Sir - and, as a student of telecom, from my own professional perspective - that it is in our power to make BSNL, VSNL, MTNL and all such companies in all these sectors in which they operate as really strong national symbols of achievement and success.

Sir, I will take one or two minutes more on the question of IT, and I am done. Sir, on the IT again, we brought forward the legislation in 2000. And I would commend the Government of the day at that time, and ourselves, that we were, I think, the third to introduce this legislation, after Singapore and the USA. It is broadly a good piece of legislation. But it does not address all the issues. It only addresses certification issues, key issues. I think the protection of cyber privacy is less than adequate. The enforcement mechanism is less than desirable. I think you need to have a very careful look at how this legislation is sought to be enforced in the developed countries where this had started.

4.00 P.M.

Sir, the IT software services sector, your Report tells us, is capable of generating 650,000 jobs for the IT professionals. Sir, if you were to look at our unemployment rate amongst the educated, this is not enough. This is certainly not enough. I know that we need to have more centres of excellence. But I also know that the indirect employment generation, consequent upon the services sector growth, is less than grasped in your Report. I think the figures are not right. And if these are the right figures, then we certainly ought to do a lot more because, for the first time, we are seeing in this country a negative rate in employment generation on an annual basis;, and that is why, I remember, in the Budget debate, where I had the privilege to speak on behalf of my party, the hon. Finance Minister and all the Members speaking from the Treasury Benches told us that employment generation now would be backed by the services sector. But, if this is the extent of employment, it is not enough.

Sir, the last point that I wish to make is about encouraging cooperation with overseas companies. But, how are we going to encourage that overseas cooperation on the scale that we need to? Sir, I am again and again on this scale. I know Rome was not built in a day. I know it will take time. But, the version of my presentation this afternoon, Sir, is to ensure that you ought to take now concrete measures, very, very specific measures, specific to each company, specific to the sector, specific to making a detailed study on what are the core competences within the IT and the telecom sectors.

Sir, in conclusion, I would once again invite your attention to the prime need to dispel the misconception of conscious and unconscious bias in policy formulation, conscious and unconscious acts of omission that seek to question the credibility of otherwise meaningful initiatives. Thank you very much, Sir, for having given me this opportunity to speak on this subject.

उपसभाध्यक्ष (श्री बालकवि बैरागी) : श्री एस. विद्युतलै विरुम्बी, आपकी पार्टी के सात मिनट हैं।

SHRI S. VIDUTHALAI VIRUMBI (Tamil Nadu): Sir, I hope you will be considerate. Mr. Vice-Chairman, Sir, thank you very much for having given me this opportunity to make my observations on Telecom, Department of Posts and IT. Sir, in all the three sectors, namely, Telecom, Posts and IT, we have developed much more than what we had expected about a decade ago. Even though some issues are to be sorted out, I hope it will be sorted out. Sir, if you take the last five years, you will find that a lot of development has taken place in the telecom sector. Even though tele-density is skewed in favour of urban areas, this reflects the economic situation and the way in which India has developed. The tele-density in the urban areas is 4.9 per cent and in the rural areas it is 1.4 per cent. Now, take the development of the telecom sector from March, 1999 till date. In March, 1999, the private sector had its role for five per cent only, and now it is able to capture nearly 20 per cent. Now, 20 per cent of our telecom operations are being handled by it.

Sir, in the telecom sector, in the last ten years, the manpower has come down from 64 persons per 1000 direct lines to nine persons. You have announced some package schemes, general plan, economy schemes, special scheme and super plan. When you announced this, you announced some sort of sops, concessions for the telecom sector that if STD calls are made from the fixed to cellular networks, if it is 200 kilometres and above, then, it would become 25 per cent cheaper than the existing rates. The TRAI had announced in their policy that no operator will be allowed to indulge in discriminatory tariff practices. In that connection, the DoT said that if a call is made from the fixed line to their own cellular network, the same concession of 25 per cent would be available, and there would be no discrimination. The TRAI has instructed the cellular operators. One particular operator - I don't want to name it because it is not proper to take names in the House - has said that it will charge 40 paise for a STD call, if the same cellular company is operating from the originating terminal. Sir, if the cellular phones on both the ends are of the same company, then the user has to pay 40 paise. But the TRAI has said that it should apply to other companies also. But there is no affirmative reply, a positive reply from the private companies. Then what is the reaction of the TRAI? There is a public apprehension that the TRAI is not functioning in an unbiased manner. This aspect has to be looked into because it is being felt that it favours the private operator. You have to just go into the aspect because there is an apprehension.

You have to find out whether it has any basis or not. We have to be careful in this regard because 95 per cent of the fixed lines which were with the DoT are now rather depleting. If we have 45 million telephones, it means that after five year this number may be 100 million telephones. At that time the BSNL will be in minority. The private people will enter the market. You have to be very careful in that respect. Sir, now I come to the package scheme. What I feel the BSNL or the DoT should do is that they should give a package indicating that for every 100 calls so and so calls are free, instead of making 30 calls free as they have announced. Now they are saying for a Rental of Rs.250, the number of free calls will be 30, for the rental of Rs.350 the number of free calls will be 150, for the rental of Rs.750, the number of free calls will be 600, and for the rental of Rs.1650, 1800 calls are free. Instead of this, they should give free calls on per hundred calls. If this is done, I hope, it will enhance their business. This is my suggestion. Sir, the 25 per cent concession that the DoT has proposed to give, according to their own calculation, the impact will be between Rs.400 crores and Rs.500 crores loss. They expect that it would be offset or compensated by an increased rate in traffic. This is their opinion. Sir, in spite of the workload having increased, the number of staff is decreasing. They have to keep this aspect in mind. If you see the number of the last four or five years, this number has come down from 4,28,000 to 4,16,000. It is likely to reduce further. Sir, at present for the cellular handsets we are depending on foreign counties. I think, R and D can be done in this area. They have very good R and D in the DoT. When they are able to make the fixed telephones, I feel the cellular phones can also be manufactured in India itself, which may be equivalent to those which are manufactured in foreign countries. Therefore, the Government should concentrate on this particular area.

Now I come to the Department of Posts. I had congratulated the hon. Minister and still I stand by that. The hon. Minister gave an assurance that not a single staff would be removed. He gave this assurance the other day. We hope that assurance would be kept intact. But there is a small doubt because in the Tenth Plan I find on page 1022 wherein it has been stated that first we can achieve it through diversification, and then again by postal tariff cost and reduction can be effected though upgradation of modernisation and technology and redeployment and reduction of manpower. The reduction of manpower is a very serious word. According to the Tenth Plan, in the Postal Services

manpower would be reduced. But according to the assurance given by the Minister not a single employee would be retrenched. It means that the existing staff will not be dismissed, but those who retire or take VRS in their cases the Government has decided not to fill up those posts. It is clear. It is very dangerous. That is number one. Then, in the Department of Posts...*(time-bell)*...Sir, I will take just two to three minutes. We are discussing here a very important subject. Sir, I quote from page 1021 of the Tenth Five Year Plan. It says, "The present scheme of opening rural post offices, i.e. EDBOs, has a large element of in-built subsidy of 67 per cent in normal areas and 85 per cent in hilly and tribal areas. This is not sustainable in the long run. Besides, the agents under the scheme tend to demand being given the status of permanent Government employees. If this is agreed to, it will put a tremendous strain on the financial system. The scheme needs to be replaced by an innovative programme of providing services in the rural areas. Two feasible options that must be explored are converting extra departmental employees into franchisees of the Department for providing postal services in rural areas and reactivating the scheme of licensed postal agents." This is the observation. This is what you have mentioned in the Tenth Five Year Plan. This clearly shows that the Government wanted to throw out the Extra Departmental employees through the route of privatisation. The document, really, says like this. It is contrary to the assurance given by the hon. Minister. Therefore, we request the hon. Minister to stand by his assurance given to this august House. You have assured the House that nobody would be sent out. Here, in this document, it is said that they would be sent out. The Tenth Five Year Plan says that the Department would be privatised. Therefore, it is a very dangerous tendency.

Now, I wish to quote from a news item that appeared in *The Times of India* of 18th April, 2003. The news report says and I quote, "The Centre on Thursday moved the Supreme Court against the order of the Telecom Dispute Settlement and Appellate Tribunal directing it to provide cellular operators copies of certain sensitive documents relating to the contentious Wireless in Local Loop issue and said the disclosure of such papers would harm public interest..." - I am not going into this; I want to mention here what you have said subsequently - "...It sought to preserve the privilege on the contents of its documents and files from being disclosed in legal proceedings to private litigation parties which have the

commercial and other interests." Sir, the Government has agreed in the court that the private operators are not only having commercial interest but you have also mentioned in the court about 'other interests.' I want to know what are those 'other interests' of the private service provider? We want to know that.

The Government have given some concessions for IT in the recent Budget. I agree with it. The Information Technology is really doing a commendable service. Sir, the exports, within a span of five years, has gone up from nearly Rs. 30,000 crores to Rs. 80,000 crores. In the Tenth Five Year Plan we have set a target of Rs. 2,82,000 crores. It is doing a very commendable service. We are very thankful for that. I would like to give two suggestions for the consideration of the hon. Minister on Information Technology. Now, there is a very stiff competition. Now, in Germany, the 'son of the soil' principle has taken root. In the USA, every State is passing legislation that outsourcing should be stopped in such a way that within a span of next five years, the service sector is affected. We have to face this problem from the European Countries and the USA. What plan do we have to face such challenges? We are getting foreign exchange through our service sector. But, definitely, we are going to be affected within a quinquennium. A quinquennium back, when Dr. Karunanidhi was the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, he had not 'only constructed the tidal power project but also started computer education for school children from VI standard. It should be implemented throughout India. Once a student passes his V standard and gets promoted to VI standard, computer education should be made compulsory. By the time he reaches X standard, he should have the knowledge of, at least, Data Entry Operation. Sir, I would only add one more point. Now, if he wanted to compete with other youths of the developing countries, he must not only have command in computer operation but also in shorthand. It has got its own potential when he competes with the other youth, coming from other countries, in the international market. Therefore, this is essential. I hope the Government will look into this.

Sir, the last sentence is, the way we have telephone directory for all the Government departments, I request you to have a directory containing web addresses of all the Government departments.

With these words, I conclude. Thank you.

उपसभाध्यक्ष (श्री बालकवि बैरागी) : प्रो0 राम देव भंडारी । भंडारी जी, आप के पास सात मिनट हैं ।

प्रो0 राम देव भंडारी (बिहार) : महोदय, आज के युग को मॉडर्न टैक्नालोजी मे अगर हम सूचना क्रांति का युग कहें तो अतिशयोक्ति नहीं होगी । महोदय, सूचना प्रौद्योगिकी के क्षेत्र मे रोज नए-नए परिवर्तन हो रहे हैं । आज हमारे पास कोई नया कम्प्यूटर आता है, कुछ ही महीनो के बाद टैक्निकली इम्प्रूव्ड दूसरा कम्प्यूटर आ जाता है और हमारा कम्प्यूटर हमें पुराना लगने लगता है । आज कम्प्यूटर और इंटरनेट से हम दुनिया के किसी भी कोने मे सेकंड्स मे सूचना का आदान-प्रदान कर सकते हैं । चाहे उद्योग हो, शिक्षा हो - सभी क्षेत्रो मे और खासकर मीडिया के क्षेत्र मे कम्प्यूटर और इंटरनेट ने अपना प्रमुख स्थान बना लिया है । दुनिया के किसी भी कोने में कोई घटना घटित हो उस का सजीव चित्रण हम घर बैठे टेलिविजन पर देख सकते हैं । अभी इराक, अमेरिका का युद्ध हुआ तो उधर युद्ध हो रहा था और हम उसे अपने टेलिविजन पर लाइव देख रहे थे । सूचना प्रौद्योगिकी के क्षेत्र मे सचमुच मे बहुत बड़ी क्रांति हुई है और यह प्रौद्योगिकी शक्ति का एक बहुत बड़ा स्रोत बन गयी है ।

महोदय, मैं यहां दो बाते कहने के लिए खड़ा हुआ हूं। सूचना प्रौद्योगिकी का बहुत विस्तार हुआ है, मगर इस का लाभ आम लोगों तक नहीं पहुंच पाया है। इस का अधिकाधिक प्रयोग विश्व बाजारो के उद्देश्यो को देखते हुए किया जा रहा है जबकि यह संपूर्ण समाज और मानवता के विकास के लिए होना चाहिए था । उस की प्रगति के लिए होना चाहिए था जिस में यह इनफॉर्मेशन टैक्नॉलोजी बहुत महत्वपूर्ण काम कर सकती है । महोदय, यह टैक्नॉलोजी देश के गांवो तक नहीं पहुंची है । इस देश मे साढ़े 5 लाख से अधिक गांव हैं और तकरीबन् 2 हजार से अधिक शहर हैं । जब तक यह टैक्नालोजी 65 से 70 प्रतिशत गांवो मे रहने वालो तक नही पहुंचेगी इस टैक्नॉलोजी का लाभ उन को नही होगा तब तक सही मायने में इस क्रांति को पूरी क्रांति नही कहा जाएगा । आज तेजी से शहरीकरण हो रहा है, औद्योगीकरण हो रहा है और यही कारण है कि हम अपना ध्यान गांवो की ओर नहीं दे पाते हैं । अभी भी हमारा ध्यान पूरी तरह शहरो की ओर लगा हुआ है। हमारी सोच और प्रयास गांवों की तरफ नही है । यह इसलिए है कि गांवो के मुकाबले मे शहर आर्थिक रूप से, राजनीतिक और सांस्कृतिक रूप से अधिक संपन्न हैं, अधिक मजबूत हैं । इसलिए भारत के गांवों तक इस प्रौद्योगिकी को पहुंचाने में विलंब हो रहा है । किसी तकनीक को, किसी टैक्नोलोजी को उस हालत में बनाते हैं, जिससे लगे कि इसका लाभ आम लोगों के जीवन मे हो सकता है। ऐसा नही है कि गांव में विकास की संभावनाएं नही हैं। इस टैक्नोलोजी के माध्यम से गांव का विकास संभव है, काफी संभावनाएं हैं। गांवों में कई तरह की योजनाएं चलती हैं, ग्रामीण विकास की योजनाएं चलती हैं। गांव के जो किसान हैं, उनकी जो उपज होती है, जो फसल, सब्जी, फैल होते हैं, उनके बारे में सूचनाओं का आदान-प्रदान हो सकता है, जो बिचौलिए होते हैं उनसे किसान को बचाया जा सकता है। इसमें यह सूचना तंत्र काफी मदद कर सकता है।

महोदय, आप जानते हैं कि शुरू शुरू में जब रेडियो गांव में पहुंचा था तो गांव में वह या तो पंचायत भवन में होता था या सामुदायिक भवन में होता था या स्कूल मे होता था तो वहां गांव के सब लोग जुड़ते थे। उसी तरह जब टेलीविजन गांव में पहुंचा तो स्कूल मे, सामुदायिक भवन में पहले टेलीविजन लगा और वहां लोग टेलीविजन देखने को-जुटते थे। मैं यह कहना चाहता हूँ कि अभी भी गांव में किसान की इतनी क्षमता नहीं है कि अपने घर में वह कम्प्यूटर लगाए। इसलिए गांव में इस प्रकार की व्यवस्था होनी चाहिए कि जो वहां सामुदायिक भवन हो या जो पंचायत भवन हो या पोस्ट-आफिस हो, वहां इनको लगाया जाए। कुछ गांव मे टेलीफोन सुविधा भी है । वैसे अब तो डब्लूएलएल का प्रावधान भी हो गया है। वहाँ हम कम्प्यूटर लगा सकते हैं। इससे गांव के किसान वहां जमा होंगे, इकट्ठा होंगे और उनको सूचनाएं प्राप्त होंगी, जिन सूचनाओं के माध्यम से उनको लाभ होगा। इस तरह इस तकनीक का लाभ उन तक पहुंचाया जा सकता है।

महोदय, अभी भी हमारे आदिवासी भाई जिन क्षेत्रों में रहते हैं, नदियों, पहाड़ों वाला जो क्षेत्र है, वहां तक यह तकनीक अभी तक नहीं पहुंची है। सरकार का कर्त्तव्य है कि उन तक भी इस तकनीक का लाभ पहुंचाया जाए। मैं एक बात पुन: आपके माध्यम से दोहराना चाहूंगा कि कोई भी क्रांति इस देश में तब तक पूरी नहीं होगी, अधूरी रहेगी जब तक कि उस क्रांति का लाभ गांव तक नहीं पहुंचेगा।

अंत में, महोदय, मैं टेलीफोन के बारे मे एक बात कहना चाहूंगा कि अभी भी टेलीफोन की वर्किंग के बारे में इस विभाग पर लोगो की विश्वसनीयता कम है। ये आम शिकायते हैं और हर जगह की शिकायतें हैं। चाहे प्रारंभ में टेलीफोन लगाने का मामला हो या रिपेयरिंग का मामला हो, लोगों को परेशानी होती है। अभी भी टेलीफोन टेम्परिंग होती है, आप टेलीफोन नहीं करेंगे मगर बिल आपके टेलीफोन पर आएगा। एक्सेस बिलिंग होती है। आज टेलीफोन लग्जरी नहीं रह गया है, नेसेसिटो हो गया है। धीरे धीरे यह सभी घरों में प्रवेश कर रहा है बल्कि प्रवेश कर गया है। टेलीफोन के मामले में जो परेशानी उपभोक्ताओ को होती है, उन परेशानियों की वजह से कभी कभी उपभोक्ता अपना टेलीफोन वापस कर देते हैं। आम लोगो में विश्सनीयता बनाए रखने के लिए मंत्री महोदय को इस ओर विशेष ध्यान देना चाहिए। मैं जानता हूँ कि मंत्री जी बहुत बुद्धिमान हैं, बहुत काबिल हैं और इसलिए हम आशा करते हैं कि इस विभाग में इनके आने के बाद जो कमी हैं, जो शिकायतें हैं उनको सुलझाने का आप प्रयास करेंगे। बहुत बहुत धन्यवाद, महोदय।

श्री गांधी आज़ाद (उत्तर प्रदेश) : उपसभाध्यक्ष महोदय, मैं गांव से आता हूं और गांव में आज से 20 साल पहले बूढ़ी मां अपने शहर में रहने वाले बेटे का हाल-चाल जानने के लिए चिट्ठी लिखवाती थी और उसको बेटे का हाल-चाल महीनों तक नहीं मिल पाता था। आज वही बूढ़ी मां अपने बच्चे से हाल-चाल जानती ही नहीं है बल्कि टेलिफोन के माध्यम से उसकी ज़बानी वह हाल-चाल खुद सुन लेती है। इतना ही नहीं, आज सब्ज़ी बेचने वाली एक अनपढ़ महिला सब्ज़ी बेचते-बेचते अपने मोबाइल फोन से देश की दूसरी मंडियों से सब्ज़ियों के भाव का पता भी लगा लेती है। इस तरह से वैज्ञानिक युग का यह एक क्रांतिकारी परिवर्तन सूचना एवं संचार प्रौद्योगिकी के रूप में हुआ है।

महोदय, सूचना और प्रौद्योगिकी देश के विकास के लिए एक इंजन के समान है। इस इंजन के गतिमान रहने से ही देश के विकास की गति दिनोदिन बढ़ने की संभावना है। इसलिए इस मंत्रालय की पूर्ण कोशिश होनी चाहिए कि सूचना एवं प्रौद्योगिकी का कार्य एवं कार्य-प्रणाली हर स्तर पर सही हो। इसके लिए पर्याप्त संसाधनो को जुटाने की भी आवश्यकता है, इस पर भी सरकार को ध्यान देना आवश्यक है।

इस समय सूचना और प्रौद्योगिकी क्षेत्र में सकल घरेलू उत्पाद का अंश 2.4 प्रतिशत है और कुल निर्यात का अंश 20 प्रतिशत है। वर्ष 2008 तक सकल घरेलू उत्पादन मे यह अंश 7 प्रतिशत बढ़ने की संभावना है और देश के कुल निर्यात मे यह अंश 35 प्रतिशत होने की संभावना है। इसलिए इसे और प्रोत्साहन देने की आवश्यकता है। सॉफ्टवेअर क्षेत्र, सूचना और प्रौद्योगिकी क्षेत्र मे सार्वजनिक विदेशी मुद्रा अर्जित करने वाला क्षेत्र भी है। वर्ष 2008 तक सम्पूर्ण अर्थव्यवस्था का सर्वाधिक निर्यात करने वाला यह एक अग्रणी संघटक हो जाएगा।

महोदय, सूचना और प्रौद्योगिकी क्षेत्र मे अधिक रोज़गार बढ़ने की भी संभावना है। भारत इस क्षेत्र में अपनी प्रतिस्पर्धा शक्ति पहले ही विश्व स्तर पर कायम कर चुका है, जिससे देश का सम्मान भी बढ़ा है। इसलिए हम इस मंत्रालय को, इस विभाग को और साथ ही साथ देश को बधाई भी देना चाहते हैं।

महोदय, इसके साथ ही साथ मैं मंत्री महोदय से निवेदन करना चाहता हूं कि दिसम्बर, 2000 में जो टेलिफोन कनेक्शन के लिए आवेदन पत्र दिए गए थे, मेरी जानकारी के अनुसार अभी उनमें से बहुत सारे कनेक्शन पेंडिग पड़े हुए हैं। इसलिए मैं निवेदन करना चाहूंगा कि जब इस तरह की क्रांति हो रही है तो उन 2000 और 2001 के कनेक्शंस को त्वरित गति से लगवाने का काम किया जाए। साथ ही साथ टेलिफोन संबंधी बहुत सारी शिकायतों पर विभाग के कर्मचारियों द्वारा ध्यान नही दिया जाता है, इसलिए मैं निवेदन करना चाहूंगा कि इन शिकायतों को त्वरित गति से निबटाने का निर्देश भी दिया जाए। महोदय, रेलवे विभाग के बाद यह देश का दूसरा सबसे बड़ा विभाग है। इसमे कर्मचारियो और अधिकारियो की संख्या रेलवे के बाद दूसरे नंबर पर है लेकिन आज तक इस विभाग में भी अनुसूचित जाति, अनुसूचित जनजाति व पिछड़े वर्गो का किसी भी श्रेणी मे कोटा पूरा नही किया गया है। मैं मंत्री महोदय से निवेदन करूंगा कि सभी श्रेणियों मे वे आरक्षण का कोटा पूरा करने का निर्देश दें। इसके साथ ही साथ वे अपने स्तर से बैकलॉग और प्रोन्नति के मामले मे भी आरक्षण पूरा करने का निर्देश जारी करने का कष्ट करे।

महोदय, इस क्षेत्र मे पब्लिक क्षेत्र के साथ-साथ प्राइवेट क्षेत्र के आगे आने की संभावना ज्यादा है और प्राइवेट क्षेत्र की भागीदारी भी इस वैश्यिक युग में बढ़ती जा रही है। इसलिए मैं मंत्री महोदय से मांग करूंगा कि प्राइवेट क्षेत्र मे भी अनुसूचित जाति, अनुसूचित जनजाति तथा पिछड़े वर्गों का कोटा सुनिश्चित किया जाए और उसे लागू किया जाए। आप इसे पूरा करेंगे, इसी आशा और विश्वास के साथ मैं अपनी बात समाप्त करता हूं। धन्यवाद।

उपसभाध्यक्ष (श्री बालकवि बैरागी) : माननीय मंत्री जी, आपने शायद अनुवाद सुना होगा, जब AIADMK के श्री एस.एस. चन्द्रन साहब बोल रहे थे तो उन्होंने बताया कि उनका खुद का टेलीफोन पिछले 20 दिनों से खराब है। आप कृपया इस बात का नोटिस लीजिएगा।

SHRI K.B. KRISHNA MURTHY (Karnataka): Thank you very much, Sir, for giving me an opportunity to speak on this subject.

Sir, the second half of the 20th century triggered of the digital revolution, and today the Information Technology revolution has touched every aspect of our lives. A situation has been reached where dependency on information technology has reached gigantic proportions. Today, our barest needs are driven by information technology-related services. To cite a few, our banking, healthcare, medical diagnostics, transport, scientific research, maintenance of Government records, hospitality industry, industrial production are some of them, and the list is endless; and, even the national security is largely dependent on information technology-related services. We have also seen that major wars, which were fought in Afghanistan and Iraq, were fully orchestrated by weapons dependent on information technology.

Now, coming back to our country, I would like to state with pride that India has emerged as a leader in the information technology and has produced some of the best and largest information technology companies in the world, and accounts for a very large proportion of software engineers who are employed in various parts of the world; and, information technology sector, as such, has contributed a lot to our GDP and to build up our foreign reserves through export of software products.

I would like to state that one of the greatest advantages India has is the knowledge of English, because the entire information technology services thrives on English. We have overtaken China in this aspect, as of now, for the reason that China has a language problem, and due to linguistic egoism they have neglected English and handicapped themselves in becoming a forerunner in producing software engineers. In the light of the above observation, I must caution the State Governments that they should refrain from legislating laws to make medium of instruction in primary education in the local State languages, and, instead, introduce English as a medium of instruction in all schools, whether in rural or urban areas. The State Governments should initiate

the process of introducing English as a medium of instruction because the main impetus of development of information technology and information-related services are highly English language-oriented.

Sir, after the advent of information technology revolution in our country, we now have the emergence of the telecom revolution and with liberalisation and privatisation of the telecom sector, India is witnessing the entry of giant telecom multinational companies and the State-owned BSNL is facing stiff competition, and the market forces are governing the telecom industry. The State-owned BSNL should shed its veneer and stop considering itself as a Government company and further should inculcate corporate culture and compete with private operators and deliver goods and should dispense services of excellent standards. Failure to do so will result in the public opting for private operators in telecom industry and we could witness a day when we may have to seek disinvestment of our telecom sector in line with the disinvestment which we are witnessing in the public sector undertakings. The Ministry of Telecommunication should motivate the BSNL to make optimum use of the state resources and provide the vital services relating to telecom, which is vital to growth of our country in all respect.

Sir, I have travelled to several countries and witnessed the great advantage of e-governance. The order of the day is paperless commerce, paperless banking and paperless class rooms. I am pained to note that though we have made giant strides in the field of software development and Indian software companies are developing programmes for the management of various governmental programmes of developed industries, but our Government has not exploited the Information Technology sector for its own governance. My advice to the Government is that they constitute a Commission of top Information technology technocrats and embark on a massive programme to computerise all aspects of Government and thereby enhancing its efficiency and promoting it to bloom into a powerful economy. The Government should address the above issue at the earliest in the interest of our nation.

Regarding e-governance, His Excellency, the President of India had come to Bangalore. Here I would like to quote him. The President "called for a national policy on e-governance with each State specialising in the area of its expertise. In his presentation at a panel discussion on

"IT for the Common Man" organised at the Banquet Hall of Vidhana Soudha as a part of the IT.com 2002 here, Dr. Kalam stressed the need for a national agenda for e-governance with a committed schedule for implementation of various stages. "Each State can take up areas of their core competence. For instance, Maharashtra could specialise in e-commerce and Kerala in education and nursing network", he said and felt that since the Indian administration and rules are nearly identical across the States, it was best to standardise on e-governance and to have a common policy. "If each State works on its own then it would slow our overall progress. However, if each State specialises in the areas of its expertise and then share the know-how we can compete globally." I think, we should take his advice. Sir, Bangalore is the capital of Information Technology; it is called the Silicon Valley of India. The Chief Minister of Karnataka, Shri S.M. Krishna has really and excellently given encouragement to this field. He said, "There are 300 million people below the poverty line. Our concern should be to take care of this sector of people and it can be achieved by effective pronouncement and implantation of e-governance initiatives."

My last point is about Telecom Department. I would like to draw the attention of the hon. Minister that in the Telecom Department there is a tiny sector called as HAM operators who are amateur wireless radio operators and operate under a wireless licence from the Government of India. It is primarily a hobby where a layman gets exposed to wireless communication and wherein he learns the fundamental of radio waves and wireless communication. It is my opinion in view of telecommunications gaining importance in the present era, it would be very viable if the Government introduces this hobby in primary education and in their curriculum. At this point, I would like to mention that I am a HAM myself and was involved in a lot of disaster related social activities after earthquake and floods in Andhra Pradesh and in so many other rescue operations.

In conclusion, I would like to state that India has achieved the great distinction of being a leader in Information Technology. The Government should provide necessary infrastructure and maintain the tempo failing which the Indian Information Technology caravan which has travelled far and wide and brought riches and prosperity to our country will slip back and later it may be too late to put it back on track.

SHRI DRUPAD BORGOHAIN (Assam): Mr. Vice-Chairman, Sir, I thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak on this subject. Sir, Information Technology is developing very fast in the world. India is also in a leading position. It is also not lagging behind. India is advancing in this field, and even export is also increasing. But the question is, out of 100 crores of people, how much population is centring around this most modern and sophisticated Information Technology?

To my mind, a vast majority of people, may be about 80 per cent, do not have attached themselves to this modern field of Information Technology directly. Most of the people, the bulk of them in the villages and even towns, have not seen computers, not to speak of knowing e-mail, e-governance, internet etc. That is my viewpoint. Even most of them do not have a telephone at their house or do not know how to use a telephone. So, I would confine myself to a few points on the working of the telecommunication system in our country and the activities of the Ministry of Communications. Sir, communication is very vital in the modern society, where developments in the field of science and technology are taking place at a fast pace, and where information from different parts of the world can be received or can be sent within a few minutes to any part of the world now-a-days.

[THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI SANTOSH BAGRODIA) in the Chair]

So, it is very much essential for the smooth functioning of the Ministry of Communications. But, to our surprise, the Telecom Department is not running smoothly in different States of our country. Not to speak of the hilly region of the North-Eastern States, the position is rather bad in the villages. Sir, let me pinpoint certain malfunctioning of this Department due to which the consumers are suffering the most. A sizeable number of telephones are either dead or cross connected or partly working. Here, the famous cable fault is the term used by the Department. But, what is cable fault? Only god knows! Secondly, the telephone exchanges mostly situated in village areas, are non-functional. The consumers are suffering in these cases. Thirdly, the telephone bills are supposed to be sent to the consumers in time. But I say it emphatically that majority of the consumers do not get the bills in time, and some of them receive the same after they are fined for non-payment of the bills for no fault on their part, but for the negligence on the part of the Telecom Department. So,

the Department is not functioning efficiently in this regard. Then, those who have paid money for getting telephone connections, are in the waiting list for years. A promise was made by the then Minister that the entire waiting list would be covered within a very short time. But, nothing has been done in this regard, and it merely remains a promise. People come to us for getting a telephone out of the MP quota after they have failed to get it for two years, three years or even five years. Mr. Minister, in this very house, your predecessor had given an assurance that this problem would be solved within a very short time, but without any effect. Some times, the consumers are overcharged. If a dispute arise, it remains pending for months together. As the waiting list becomes longer and longer, the corruption at lower level is greater and greater. Under every exchange in every district of India, I am sure that such corruption is rampant. I have seen it in my home State in Assam. The Department is doing nothing to eradicate such corruption. The Minister had once promised in the House that within one month of getting the request of the MP to give a telephone connection to a person the Department would install a telephone at his residence. But that is still a false promise. It takes months and months, three, four, five months, to provide telephonic connection to the consumers. To minimise the waiting list, and also, for the quick expansion of telephone network, the new technology of WLL has been brought in. But, to our surprise, it will also take years and years to have such WLL technology fixed under telephone districts. Now, privatisation is everywhere, and the field of telecommunication is no exception; it has been privatised to some extent. Mobile phones services are given to some private enterprises, only to loot the consumers. Such anomalies are there in the activities of Communications Ministry. Perhaps, such anomalies in the department have come from the Head of the Department. Will the hon. Minister pay heed to these points?

Then, the density of telephones is the lowest in the North-East region. Of course, there is some difficult terrain there, particularly in the hilly areas of the North-Eastern States. Yet, in the villages of Assam, Manipur and Tripura, where there is no such difficulty, one is surprised by the lowest density of telephones. It is much lower in comparison with other States of our country. In most places of Assam and other States of North-East, there is no mobile phone facility. These are some of the areas in which the work of Communications Ministry is unsatisfactory, or rather

bad. I urge upon the hon. Minister to look into the matters, and request him to set things right. Thank you, Sir.

SHRI SHANKAR ROY CHOWDHURY (West Bengal) : Mr. Vice-Chairman, Sir, this is a good opportunity to discuss the sphere of activities of a technology, which is really becoming the backbone of our future. But, I would like to focus on, you may like to call it, the 'obverse side' of Information Technology; something that, as we expand our Information Technology facilities, I hope, and I am sure, we are paying attention to. As you are aware, Sir, Information Technology is a great facilitator; it is a tremendous multiplier for the development of a nation. But, if we read Alwyn Toffler, particulary his book "Future Shock", which I am sure the Minister has read, we must also be aware how extraordinarily vulnerable Information Technology infrastructure is. My query, therefore, through you, Sir, to the hon. Minister would be that while we are expanding our Information Technology network, as indeed we should, the "e" word has become a very key word in the English language - 'e-governance', 'e-banking', 'e-administration', etc. It is also the job of the Government, which I am sure, it is doing, to ensure that these are protected against attempts to disable the sector; because the obverse of Information Technology is 'Information Warfare'. There is a phrase, which is increasingly gaining currency today, in today's disturbed international situation; it is called "non-military war actions". These actions are not carried out by soldiers; these are carried out by students, by scientists, by hackers, either on their own, or in many cases, on instructions of their governments. I would, therefore, like to draw the attention of the hon. Minister, through you, Sir, to the requirement of protecting the infrastructure that we are building up, against attempts to demolish it, by using a wide variety of measures, which are today becoming available to the Information Technology community through the medium of - we have all heard of these things - 'Virus', 'e-worms'. These, sometimes, get generated on their own, and, then, they affect the entire Information Technology. They cause the entire information systems to crash. The hon. Minister, and all of us, indeed, must be very well aware that today, even with an inadequate amount of Information Technology that we have, we require to go a very long way, but in certain systems, whether it is banks or whether it railway reservations or whether it is airline reservations, the instances of computer system crashing is becoming more and more frequent. Is it an accident? Is it happening in

the normal course of events? Or, are these engineered by outside agencies? 'Cyber Security' is a word not too often mentioned when we discuss Information Technology. How well protected are the fire walls of these systems? Do our normal banking systems which are now doing 'e-banking' have adequate fire walls? Does a simple thing like the airline reservation system, which is on all-India basis, have adequate fire walls? I find from the Annual Report, which the Ministry has made available, that they have a wing in the Department of Telecommunications called the Wireless Planning and Coordination Wing. What does the name suggest? What it suggests is one of its functions. Or, is there any organisation which has a specific task in the Ministry of Telecommunications to ensure that whatever software we use, the source we get it from, whether it is indigenous or whether it is imported, is protected against these attempts which may be made to disable the total infrastructural backbone of the country?

Increasingly, we are coming across various instances. Yesterday, the hon. Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister mentioned the various issues that are confronting the internal security of the country today. And we read in the newspapers that, increasingly, the leads of these attempts are being provided by monitoring of the mobile phone circuits. Increasingly when you get on the Internet, you find that the Indian sites, particularly of the Indian Government organisations, particularly those with a certain amount of security value like the Bhaba Atomic Research Commission sites, are being entered into, they are being hacked and they are being destroyed. Does the Ministry of Telecommunications have a cyber plan as it continues to push the 'e-infrastructure' through the country? As we expand our e-infrastructure, as we seek to ensure that our e-infrastructure travels outwards, to the most remotest part of the country, does the Government or the Ministry of Telecommunications or the Department of Information Technology have a coordinated parallel plan to ensure that the security of such infrastructure is maintained? We keep talking about the war in Iraq. It is a good example to take, because one of the so-called weapons, which I don't think was used in Iraq, is something called an e-bomb, and e-bomb apparently generates a certain kind of radiation which destroys your entire Information Technology infrastructure. And this, they say, can only be protected if you have certain types of very strong fire-walling. Do we have the know-how for it? I am sorry, I am focusing on the negative aspect of the information

technology. But, as I said, this future shock and third wave is giving you a good forecast of what this nation may face in the not-too-distant future and it is best to be prepared for it. There are very strange terms. I mentioned 'non-military war actions'. We have evidence that in certain countries certain universities have been commissioned, researches are being carried out today into this very aspect and, Mr. Vice-Chairman, Sir, not all these countries are friendly to India. There is another term; there are many such terms, let me give you one more. It is killing with the borrowed sword. What does this mean? It means that if you are in 'A' country, you commission a hacker in 'B' country who operates from this third country to attack you. So, you cannot trace these sources back to your so-called hostile source. These are the issues. I am sure, the Ministry of Information and Technology is studying in great detail and I do hope that they are coming up with these parallel systems for the protection of this very essential infrastructure that we are trying to develop.

Now, coming to a more positive point. My friend and colleague, Mr. Prithvi Raj Chavan, I strongly support him, has mentioned the grave deficiency India suffers from in the hardware aspect of information technology. We do not have a semi-conductor industry. The point was made and I do not wish to labour on that point. But where we are establishing power houses, where we are establishing Railways, where we are trying to establish all types of industries, a semi-conductor industry is something which we will not be able to get from outside very easily. We have to devote a certain amount of our resources to ensure that this mother industry, more or less, of entire information technology, is established in our country. I do wish to compliment the Indian genius specifically the Indian Institute of Science for producing two devices, one at the lowest end of the scale and one at the highest end of the scale. The highest end of the scale, I believe, they have made a super computer called 'Super Param'. I am sure that will be put to good use in our country. But more creditable than that, I do believe, they have made a very simple, very basic computer called 'Simputer'. Our hon. Members have been saying that information technology must spread out into the countryside, into the most remote villages and, perhaps, the Ministry of Information Technology may like to look at a concentrated effort to spread these very basic computers like 'Simputer' which, I believe, does not cost very much compared with the high and big brand computers. Maybe,

5.00 P.M.

this is the vehicle we have got to spread information technology to all parts of the country. Ultimately, Sir, I would like actually to bring out something that I am not very happy with and that is reservations. As regards the reservation for the class to which I belong, that is, ex-serviceman, I see from table 10 of this Annual Report of the Ministry of Telecommunications that as against a reservation of 10 per cent in Group 'C' and 15 per cent in Group 'D', for some unknown reasons, maybe our block is not strong enough, in Group 'C', instead of 10 per cent, the ex-servicemen form 0.94 per cent. In Group-D, where we are supposed to have 15 per cent, according to this Report, it is only 1.28 per cent. So, I will conclude my speech by making an appeal, through you, Sir, to the Minister to see to it that this class is not neglected and we should get the reservations that have been made for us along with other classes who have more political clout. Thank you.

श्री सुरेश भारद्वाज (हिमाचल प्रदेश) : माननीय उपसभाध्यक्ष महोदय, मैं आपका धन्यवाद करता हूं कि आपने मुझे दूरसंचार तथा सूचना प्रौद्योगिकी मंत्रालय के कार्य के बारे मे इस सदन में हो रही चर्चा मे भाग लेने का अवसर दिया। वास्तव मे यह संचार एवं सूचना का युग है। पिछले दो-तीन दशको मे इस क्षेत्र मे एक क्रांति आई है। इस क्रांति को प्राप्त करने के लिए संपूर्ण विश्व ने कबूतर से ले करके कंप्यूटर तक का सफर पूरा किया है। कोई समय होता था जब हम अपने संदेश दूसरे तक पहुंचाने के लिए कबूतर का इस्तेमाल किया करते थे। फिर हम एक स्थान से दूसरे स्थान तक बहुत महत्वपूर्ण सूचनाओ को पहुंचाने के लिए स्वयं जाते थे। फिर वायरलैस का ईजाद हुआ। अब आज हम घर बैठे-बैठे इराक युद्ध को भी देख सकते हैं, अफगानिस्तान मे क्या हो रहा है, उसकी सूचना भी प्राप्त कर सकते है और कारगिल युद्ध मे किस प्रकार से हमारे सैनिक लड़ रहे हैं, उसकी जानकारी भी हमे घर बैठे-बैठे अपने संचार माध्यमो के द्वारा प्राप्त होती रहती है। वास्तव मे किसी राष्ट्र के लिए उसके विकास की दृष्टि से दो महत्वपूर्ण कार्य होते हैं। एक तो सड़क परिवहन की दृष्टि से और वर्तमान एनडीए सरकार ने उस दृष्टि से बहुत महत्वपूर्ण उपलब्धियां प्राप्त की हैं - स्वर्णिम चतुर्भुज के रूप मे या प्रधान मंत्री ग्राम सड़क योजना के रूप मे। दूसरा, इस दृष्टि से दूरसंचार और सूचना प्रौद्योगिकी का क्षेत्र है। 80 के दशक में हिन्दुस्तान में जब श्री साम पित्रोदा की अध्यक्षता मे कमीशन बना था, उसके पश्चात् यहां पर संचार के माध्यमों में भारी प्रगति हुई है। मैं जिस प्रदेश से आता हूं, वह एक बॉर्डर स्टेट है, पर्वतीय क्षेत्र है। लेकिन उस प्रदेश मे भी संचार की दृष्टि से, वास्तव में जितनी उपलब्धियां पिछले 15-20 वर्षों में हुई हैं, मैं समझता हूं कि विशेष रूप से वे उल्लेखनीय हैं। अब यहां पर निजी क्षेत्र प्रारम्भ हो गया है, निजी क्षेत्र की भागीदारी हो रही है। सरकार मे जो टेलीकॉम डिपार्टमेंट था उसका भी कार्पोरेटाइज़ेशन किया गया है। भारत संचार निगम लि0 जो बना है, मैं समझता हूं कि जितने भी हमारे कार्पोरेट क्षेत्र हैं, खास करके जो सरकारी कंपनियां बनी हैं, उनमे जितनी तेजी से

प्रोफैशनलिज्म इस बी0एस0एन0एल0 मे आया है, उतनी तेजी से शायद दूसरी किसी भी कंपनी मे नही आया। यह ठीक है कि आज भी बहुत सारी चीज़े इसमे करने के लिए हैं। उनमें विशेष रूप से सेंसटिविटी लाने की आवश्यकता है। आज भी जब हमारे टेलिफोन खराब होते हैं तो उस की कम्प्लेंट्स कई बार उस तत्परता से दर्ज नही की जाती या उस तत्परता से कार्यवाही नही होती है जिस प्रकार से निजी क्षेत्र मे होती है । लेकिन मैं समझता हूं कि निजी क्षेत्र सामाजिक दायित्व पूरा नहीं करते हैं जब कि बी0एस0एन0एल0 को अपना सामाजिक दायित्व भी पूरा करना पड़ता है ।

महोदय, आज विलेज पब्लिक टेलिफोन हिंदुस्तान के 85 प्रतिशत गांवों तक पहुंच गया है और जो कुछ बाकी क्षेत्र हैं, उन में किन्हीं तकनीकी कारणों से वह नही पहुंच पाया है । उस दृष्टि से मैं माननीय मंत्री महोदय से निवेदन करूंगा कि विशेष रूप से हिमाचल, उत्तरांचल या नॉर्थ-ईस्ट के क्षेत्रो मे विलेज टेलिफोन शायद इस कारण नही पहुंच पाया है कि यहां पर एक्सचेंज स्थापित नही हो सके हैं । उस लिहाज से यदि सैटेलाइट एक्सचेज, माइक्रोवेव एक्सचेंज या जो एक नई पद्धति डब्ल्यू0एल0एल0 की शुरू हुई है, उस को अगर इन पर्वतीय क्षेत्रो मे आप ले जाएंगे तो मैं समझता हूं कि हम दूरसंचार के क्षेत्र मे और अधिक प्रगति कर सकते हैं ।

महोदय, आज मोबाइल की सर्विस भी प्रारंभ हुई है जिस से हमारे किसान घर मे बैठे-बैठे उस की फसल, नकदी फसल और सब्जियो के मंडियों के भाव की जानकारी ले सकते हैं । आज 1998 के बाद सारे हिंदुस्तान मे टेलिफोन्स लगभग दो गुने अधिक बढ़ गए हैं, लेकिन फिर भी हिमाचल जैसे क्षेत्र मे जो टेलिफोन डेंसिटी है, यह मात्र 7 की है। इसे और अधिक बढ़ाए जाने की आवश्यकता है । मैं समझता हूं कि यह कम्पटीशन का युग है, इसलिए बी0एस0एन0एल0 को अपने सामाजिक दायित्व को निभाने के लिए विशेष सहूलियत दिए जाने की आवश्यकता है । हालांकि आज रेट्स दिन-प्रति-दिन कम भी हो रहे हैं, लेकिन निजी क्षेत्र के लोग या दूसरी कंपनियां जहां ग्रामीण क्षेत्रों में नहीं जाती हैं वहीं बी0एस0एन0एल को अपने सामाजिक दायित्व को भी पूरा करना होता है, इस लिहाज से उसे विशेष सहूलियत देने की आवश्यकता है जिस से कि यह क्षेत्र तेजी से आगे बढ़ सकता है ।

महोदय, बी0एस0एन0एल0 मे भी कुछ ऐसी कमियां हैं जिन्हें सुधारा जा सकता है । जब इस क्षेत्र मे काम अधिक बढ़ रहा है और कहीं पर आप ऑप्टिकल फायबर की लाइंस बिछाए जाने के लिए सड़को की खुदाई के ठेके देते हैं या नए प्रोजेक्ट्स शुरू करते हैं तो विभाग मे एक नियम है कि कुछ लोगो ने 80 के दशक मे या 90 के शुरू मे कांट्रेक्टर के रूप मे रजिस्ट्रेशन करा लिया है, केवल वही लोग बी0एस0एन0एल0 मे काम कर सकते हैं, इस के अतिरिक्त वह कार्य किसी को नही मिल पाता है । अब नया कांट्रेक्टर जो स्वरोजगार चाहता है या काम करना चाहता है, इस दृष्टि से उस का पंजीकरण ही नही किया जाता है । ऐसे लोगो को काम करने के लिए या अपने क्षेत्र में घुसने की दृष्टि से मेरा माननीय मंत्री महोदय से निवेदन रहेगा कि अगर आप उन के मामले पर विचार करेंगे तो हमारे बहुत से नौजवान, बहुत से बेरोजगार और दूसरे एंटरप्रेन्योर्स जो काम करने की इच्छा रखते हैं, उन को भी काम मिल सकेगा । इस के अतिरिक्त कल एक ऐसा विज्ञापन आया है कि जहां अभी इन के

प्रोजेक्ट्स के लिए बी0एस0एन0एल0 के विज्ञापन अखबारों को दिए जाते हैं, अब मुझे ऐसे नियम की जानकारी मिली है कि आप वह चीजें केवल इन की वेबसाइट पर ही देख सकेंगे । अगर ये विज्ञापन समाचार-पत्रों में आएंगे तो अधिक लोगों को उसकी जानकारी मिल पाएगी क्योंकि आज भी अधिकतर लोग जो हैं समाचार-पत्रों के माध्यम से अधिक सूचना लेते हैं, वेब साइट पर जाकर कम लोग जानकारी लेते हैं। इस दृष्टि से मेरा निवेदन है कि बी0एस0एन0एल0 अथोरिटी को आप निर्देश दें कि वह इस पर विचार करे, जिससे यह व्यवस्था ठीक हो सकती है।

महोदय, इसी के साथ-साथ इस मंत्रालय में एक दूसरा विभाग डाक विभाग आता है, जो प्रयत्न तो कर रहा है कि इस कंपटीशन के युग में वह काम करे। लेकिन, जो हालात हैं, उसमें संचार के साधन जिस तरह से बढ़ रहे हैं, जिस तरह से अब लोग टेलीफोन के जरिए, इंटरनेट के जरिए या दूसरे संचार माध्यमों के जरिए सूचना प्राप्त कर लेते हैं उससे डाक विभाग के काम में कमी आ रही है। डाक विभाग नई-नई योजनाएं बना रहा है, लेकिन उनके पूरा होने में बहुत ज्यादा सफलता उसे नहीं मिल रही है।

महोदय, कर्मचारियों की दृष्टि से मैं यह कहना चाहूंगा कि दूर-संचार के क्षेत्र में या बी0एस0एन0एल0 के क्षेत्र में एक व्यक्ति जब चंडीगढ़ या दिल्ली में काम करता है तो वह एक ही व्यक्ति सभी चीजें आपरेट कर सकता है, लेकिन पहाड़ी क्षेत्रों में मेन पावर ज्यादा चाहिए होती है। चूंकि विभाग में शायद एक जैसे नियम पूरे देश के लिए बने हैं, इसलिए हमारे जो पर्वतीय क्षेत्र हैं, हिमाचल प्रदेश या उत्तरांचल, उनमें स्टाफ की कमी निरंतर बनी आ रही है। इसकी ओर भी मंत्री जी को ध्यान देना चाहिए क्योंकि पर्वतीय क्षेत्रों में बहुत से एक्सचेंज लगना हैं, लाइनें बिछनी हैं, लेकिन कर्मचारियों की कमी के कारण वहां काम नहीं हो पाता है।

महोदय, अंतिम बात, हमारे डाक विभाग में जो छोटे कर्मचारी हैं, जिनके बारे में माननीय सदस्यों ने भी कहा है, जो एक्सट्रा डिपार्टमेंटल एम्पलाई हैं, जो बहुत कम पैसे लेकर काम करते हैं, उनकी ओर भी सरकार का ध्यान जाना चाहिए। हमारा यह डाक विभाग एक बहुत महत्वपूर्ण और प्रिस्टीजियस विभाग हुआ करता था, जिसकी एक अच्छे विभाग के रूप में चर्चा होती थी । इस डाक विभाग में ये छोटे कर्मचारी जो ईमानदारी से काम करते हैं, उनके वेजेज के बारे में, उनके रेगुलराइजेशन के बारे में भी माननीय मंत्री जी ध्यान देंगे, ऐसी मुझे आशा है ।

महोदय, आपने मुझे इस चर्चा में भाग लेने का अवसर दिया, बहुत बहुत धन्यवाद।

PROF. SAIF-UD-DIN SOZ (Jammu and Kashmir): Mr. Vice-Chairman, Sir, I have a couple of problems to raise here regarding the State of Jammu and Kashmir. I do not want to say much on general concerns. I took a cue from Shri Shankar Roy Chowdhury when he talked of hardware. The hardware sector has been attracting my attention for quite some time. I do not know whether my friend Shri Arun

Shourie wants to continue in this Ministry. If he wants to do it, it will be a privilege for all of us. But, then he should accept this suggestion of the House that he must pay attention to hardware. My attention was attracted by Shri Azim Premji, the Chairman of the WIPRO. He repeated his last year's speech at a seminar or a workshop. He said, "The future is now only for hardware." We have made a spectacular progress in software. That is known to all of us. But the hardware sector needs a lot of attention. I don't want to go into the details.

Now I come to Jammu and Kashmir. I seek your support, Mr. Vice-Chairman, Sir. When Shri Arun Shourie took over the charge, I felt very happy because I knew him very well. He is a very hard working and very intelligent person and his style is not that of the kind of people who show a lot of weight around or are arrogant in dealing with the fellow colleagues of Parliament. So, I wrote a D.O. about the Jammu and Kashmir situation - I think he is overburdened, his hands are full, because I had alerted him that I have raised a problem of Jammu and Kashmir in the D.O. - I told him, but until this day, I am dismayed. I chose words "until this day", I have not received even the acknowledgement. So, I had expected a reply; it was my expectation and I will continue to have expectations from him. I want to invite his attention to the Jammu and Kashmir State, which, in many ways, is neglected. I will use the word 'neglected'; I will not use, I have never used the word 'discrimination'. We are a democracy and we shall continue to raise issues, but Jammu and Kashmir is neglected in many ways and Kashmir valley is particularly neglected. I had raised that issue in that D.O. letter. I would feel obliged to him if he investigates a little because he should show concern for a fellow colleague, who is here with him, that there should have been an acknowledgement. The problem is that these are small problems. Whenever I think of small things, I remember Bapu, the Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi. I shall quote him, "I learnt at the feet of my mother that one should take care of small things, bigger things take care of themselves." It is a small thing that I took up with the Minister that when we were in turmoil and so many Central Government Departments went away. Those who promoted terrorism in Kashmir *i.e.* sponsors of terrorism, got the first shot in the arm with exodus of Kashmiri Pandits. And, the second shot in their arm was that the Central Government's Departments, one after the other, closed. But, I am happy to report to this august House that all the Departments opened up from 1993

onwards, and by 1996, that by October election was very important, by that time, all the Departments had come back to Kashmir. But, in Telecommunications, there is a wonderful situation and Mr. Shourie's colleagues understand, but sometimes, they enjoy the miseries, they do not want people to raise questions. Then, they do not like to give answers. I am not raising this issue. I did not receive any copy of the Annual Report. I went to General Chowdhury and said, "How did you get this copy?" We must get it in routine. And, here is a Minister who is transparent. He must take up with his colleagues, why was this Annual Report not circulated in time? So, what I raised in the D.O. letter, I said, "There are ten top officers in the Telecommunication in Jammu and Kashmir Circle...

SHRI ARUN SHOURIE: Sir, for the Department of Telecommunications, it has been circulated.

PROF. SAIF-UD-DIN SOZ: Sir, I have not received it and I do not complain particularly about that. So many things happen. If it has not been circulated, as has been said in the House, then, you kindly look into it.

SHRI NILOTPAL BASU: Annual Report of the Department of Telecommunications has been circulated, but the same for the IT has not been circulated.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI SANTOSH BAGRODIA): He will send another copy. That's not a big thing.

PROF. SAIF-UD-DIN SOZ: Thank you, Sir, but I have not seen it. Anyway, there are ten top officers in the Telecommunication Circle, Jammu and Kashmir. Nine out of ten operate from Jammu. They conduct business, and there is only one General Manager of that rank in the Kashmir Valley. I raised this question, particularly because there is another hidden situation, which is of primary importance. Even now, the hon. Minister will be told for the sake of record that it is Chief General Manager (Telecommunications), Jammu and Kashmir Circle, Chief General Manager (Telecommunications), Srinagar, at Jammu. This happened in 1993 or 1992. What is this "at Jammu"? Because, CGM's Office has surreptitiously been shifted to Jammu. I have raised this twice, as I was

Member of that committee, that area committee; but nothing happened. I raised it earlier, but I raised this problem recently through a D.O. letter with great hope. But, nothing happened. Then, you can position this office at Jammu and say Chief General Manager, Jammu and Kashmir Circle, Jammu permanently.

It is not only that the office operates surreptitiously from Jammu. Customarily, by convention, by compulsion, when the Durbar is at Jammu, they have to hold meetings in Srinagar, and when the Durbar is in Srinagar, they have to hold one meeting of the Area Committee in Jammu. But they have not held any single meeting in Kashmir in the last two years. Therefore, the Kashmir valley's problems are piling up. And, this is no reflection on the CGM or the present General Manager. This Department has conducted itself very nicely through the turbulent years, and I must pay a tribute to one Mr. Trehan; I do not know where he is. He deserves a gold medal from the President because even though he was a heart patient, he did not leave Srinagar, and he was all the time in touch with the public until he retired. But, thereafter, I saw laxity in the Department, and the people of Kashmir are facing a lot of problems. Let me give you an idea to show the kind of problems that exist there. In the main city, there is only one centre where the bills can be paid, where the money will be collected, and there is always a long queue spreading across the road. I have taken up this case several times in the last five years, but nothing has happened. In Rawalpura, it is not workable, and people go to the main exchange. Why is it that there are not enough centres? This Department has some hidden money. For instance, we pay the security deposit. This Department does not pay that security deposit back to us. I intend raising a question also on this. They keep quiet. And, citizens have no time. I, as an individual, deposited Rs.3,000 twice, and I had no time to go the Telecom office. Once I did go to the Department, फलां टेलीफोन का मुझे वापस दे दिया जाए, मैंने चिट्ठी भी लिखी। If they say that they are earning profit, the hon. Minister must go deeper and find out what happened to the security deposits. It is a one-sided affair. There is no courtesy shown to the public. People stand in rain; people stand in sunshine; but nobody bothers. There is only one place in Srinagar where money will be paid. And, they say, "If you have not received the Bill, it is a mistake on the part of the Postal Department." Why don't they send the bills through a registered post? I am saying this because otherwise, the public suffer and they are even insulted by the

Department. The Department can afford that. This must be a general routine. In fact, in Kashmir, there are worse problems. And, I want to bring to the notice of the hon. Minister a bigger problem. Smt. Indira Gandhi said in the other House some 18 years ago - I was a Member of that House at that time - that in Kashmir, the Government of India would devote a special scheme to set up - big industries can't be set up - pollution free industries. Isn't there a fit case for cyber parks or technology parks to come up in Kashmir? There is no industry there, and a Minister of his stature, must do something there.

Now, Mr. Vice-Chairman, Sir, the funniest thing is that during the previous State Government's time, say, roughly, 18 months ago, they announced a cyber park, although it was not manned properly. One does not go into smaller things deeply. You look into the file to see how it was managed. Anyway, cyber park, or whatever it is, is in a shambles. It has not come up. So, these are the things which the hon. Minister should pay attention to.

Now, in the morning, I raised a question about the mobile services. What happens in Kashmir cannot happen in other parts of the country. Maybe, we are weak. We do not raise voice here. We say things politely, as we ought to say. The point is, an announcement was made by his predecessor here that the mobile services would be provided by the end of March or even earlier. This is on record. Now, we are in April, and it is being said that the mobile service will not be extended to the State of Jammu and Kashmir. Maybe, the Defence Ministry and the Home Ministry are doing something. This service has been provided to all the parts of India, but the State of Jammu and Kashmir is an exception. Now, when the hon. Minister rises, would he tell us, would he take this House into confidence, as to when, this mobile service would be provided to the State of Jammu and Kashmir, particularly to the Kashmir Valley because it is a must now? Yesterday, they gave us palm sets. I do not know whether I will be able to open that. But the mobile has become a must. So, this service should be extended to the State of Jammu and Kashmir. I will congratulate him, here and now, if he would answer this question and say that within a week it will be extended, because all the infrastructure has been built. I have no grouse against the Chief General Manager, or, the General Manager of Kashmir Telecom Circle. Whenever I was raising this issue, it was not a reflection on their competence. He

is a capable Minister. He must say within a week's time, he will extend this facility to the State of Jammu and Kashmir. Thank you, Sir.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI SANTOSH BAGRODIA): Before the last speaker speaks, I want to tell you, Mr. Minister one thing. There are complaints, even from MPs that bills showing the STD details and the ISD details, which used to come regularly, despite writing to the department, they do not send them for months and years. Please, look into it.

DR. ARUN KUMAR SARMA (Assam): Thank you, Mr. Vice-Chairman, Sir, for giving me this opportunity to share my experience. First of all, I congratulate the Minister and also his Ministry for leading India to a very comfortable position in the software and information technology sector. This sector has the potential of employment generation and other economic development for the country. Sir, lots of ambitious plans were declared and we must look into one important issue that while we in this transition time are moving from PSUs to private sector, the digital divide has been widened. There is disproportionate development, and if we allow this disproportionate development to carry on, we cannot unite the country.

I would like to draw the attention of the hon. Minister that there were a large number of promises made by the Government in the past for bringing the land-locked North-Eastern Region closer to the main land through an effective communication network. But the hard reality reveals a reverse trend, of depriving the region from all the recent developments. I want to cite some examples. The International Internet Gateway commissioned by the BSNL with a second-hand outdated dish antenna was brought from Orissa to Guwahati, which could not operate even for a single day. The net fee call centre operating through the STPI gateway failed due to high cost of bandwidth. The only available Kolkata-Guwahati BSNL fibre network is also worst and unreliable requiring the highest down time. Total line Internet Service Providers operating in the region did nothing except siphoning out money to invest outside the region. In our country, a total number of 56 International Internet Gateways are operating in India. An application for licence by local company for opening an international gateway at Guwahati took more than a year for its clearance, despite fulfilling all the required formalities for clearance.

I think there is a requirement for simplification of procedure for providing licences. And for the installation of the BSNL mobile telephone equipment in the North-East Region, one Ericsson India Limited was short-listed by the Bihar Telecom Circle which is the nodal circle for the entire Eastern Region, including the North-Eastern Region. It has refused to operate in the North-Eastern Region under different pretexts. Reliance has the monopoly as it is the only mobile service provider in the North-Eastern Region, and nothing has been done to improve the services. The North-East is not included in the thousands of kilometres of mobile network expansion programme of Reliance and other private parties to connect the villages and towns in the Region. Thirty-eight Base Terminal Stations sanctioned for WLL in Assam were diverted to Kerala State last year. These are examples of how there is a strong digital divide. I can give you some other specific examples also. We boast that we are experts in the software technology. Three years back, the hon. Home Minister had assured this House that we would have a Computerised National Register of Citizens. It was said that they were starting the process of computerising the whole thing. But, till today, they have not come out with anything to do that. It is very unfortunate. I hope the hon. Minister takes it up as a challenge. So far as village telephones are concerned, there are inaccessible areas having pockets of population of more than 10,000 people where, till today, no telephone service has been provided. I would be very happy if the hon. Minister takes it up as a challenge to provide telephone services, starting with those areas which are landlocked, which do not have any other means of transport except the countryboats, because we have some river islands there. I can give examples of one or two areas. These areas are: Amarpur in Tinsukia district, Sadia Sub-Division, Kobu Chapori in Dhemaji district and Ahaguri, Dhodang, Lohit Khabolu area of Jorhat and Lakhimpur districts. These are the areas where people living there do not have any means of communication. Those areas get flooded during the rainy season; and during winters also, there is no communication, no road; nothing. So, top priority should be given to those areas where there is no mode of communication. There are so many discrepancies. In reply to my question today, it was said that for international gateway of internet, in the non-governmental sector, there are 11 parties working in Delhi, 7 in Tamil Nadu and 4 in West Bengal. The point is that not a single party has gone to the North-East because it is economically not viable. So, if we allow only the private parties to operate in those areas, and if the

Government sits idle and does not entrust this work to VSNL or any other agency, I think, the digital divide will become more pronounced. There will be disproportionate development and some areas will be further left behind and they will remain isolated. This is the real challenge for the hon. Minister. If he takes up this challenge, I will definitely feel happy that he has done something for the country.

I want to point out one more issue. Probably, nobody has talked about it. There are a large number of PCOs in the country, and their number has grown manifold in the recent past. In the same locality, you find more than ten PCOs operating at the same time. Now, the telephone charges have been reduced, and with the reduced telephone charges, their commission has also come down. With the reduced commission they are finding it difficult to sustain themselves. They are unable to sustain themselves. There is going to be a lot of unemployment. These people will become unemployed shortly. Therefore, I feel there should be some restriction on opening up of new PCOs. There should be a proper assessment of this scenario.

Secondly, for new connections, a huge number of applications had been entertained along with a fee of Rs.2000, Rs.3000 or Rs.500 depending upon the area and the time of submission of the application. But till today, because of absence of cable or other reasons, these connections have not been given. Then, why were these applications taken? The Ministry must take a strong action on this particular issue so that whatever was applied and whatever was promised should be provided with the services.

Sir, the entire functioning of the Department is suffering due to inadequacy of trained staff. I hope the existing staff would be trained. The areas like North East are under-staffed. They cannot provide services for fault repairing, or, installation, or, other things. So, high priority should be given to have equilibrium with the recent developments. The North East, Jammu and Kashmir and hilly areas should not be considered on the basis of economic return. There may not be economic returns, but we must bring these areas to the mainstream. So, the Government of India should declare a special package for all these areas because it is very essential to develop these areas. It is the need of the hour.

Sir, for the North East, Bihar is the nodal telecom circle. The North Eastern Region should be given a separate nodal circle, either with the Assam telecom circle or with the North East telecom circle. Two telecom circles are operating in the North Eastern Region, and one should be made a nodal circle because it is not feasible to monitor and also to nourish that isolated region from Bihar.

On the issue of shifting of responsibility by Reliance and also by the BSNL, I would like to say something. Like Jammu and Kashmir, mobile telephone was restricted in the North Eastern Region. This restriction was lifted in the month of July. But, till date, the BSNL is shifting the responsibility to Reliance and the Reliance is shifting the responsibility to BSNL. Nobody is working for installation of mobile facilities in those remote areas. It is highly essential to have mobile phone in those insurgency-infested areas. But, this is the most neglected part. I hope the hon. Minister would take cognisance of this particular issue.

As far as Postal sector is concerned, I have personally mentioned it to the hon. Minister, but I also repeat it here. There was an application for a commemorative stamp from Assam for the centenary year celebrations of a freedom fighter, Jyoti Prasad Aggarwala, who was the cultural leader of Assam. Sir, 70 slots were sanctioned, but that was not accommodated. It is very unfortunate. I hope, by using his good offices, this would be restored because this is his centenary year. Probably, some slots can be diverted to the next year because all the 70 slots are not for centenary year celebrations.

The other issue I want to raise is this. Some community information centres were being installed in the North East through the Prime Minister's Package. Most of these centres are working in different blocks. In most of the areas, these centres are non-functional; these are almost defunct. Only some computers were supplied and they were not given specific assignments for the information to be provided. So, there should be a review of what was promised and what infrastructure has been given so that it is really used for the betterment of the people.

For the international gateway, there are applications from the private parties. I think more parties should be encouraged for that and whichever local parties have applied, their applications should be cleared

immediately. With these words, I conclude. Sir, I thank you very much for having given an opportunity to a Member - who represents a very, very remote area of this country - to put forth his views.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI SANTOSH BAGRODIA): The reply by the Minister will be tomorrow. The House is adjourned till 11 o'clock tomorrow.

The House then adjourned at thirty-nine minutes past five of the clock till eleven of the clock on Friday, the 25th April, 2003

MGIPMRND—1225RS—16.01.2004.